UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

POPULAR RADICALISM AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE NEW SOCIALIST MOVEMENT IN BRITAIN, 1870-1885

a thesis submitted for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the University of London

by

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VOL I.

University College London

January 1977

ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to describe and evaluate the contribution of the popular radical Left to the development of socialist ideas and the emergence of a distinct socialist movement in Britain during the 1870s and early 1880s.

The first two chapters focus upon the early 1870s, first examining the general tendencies of popular radicalism in this period and then analyzing the characteristic demands of some of the most militant radicals with a view toward showing how they helped prepare the ground for the seemingly sudden appearance of the new socialist movement a decade later. The third and fourth chapters are concerned with a number of historical factors which combined to create favourable conditions for the initiation of the movement — both general factors such as Britain's changing economic circumstances and the growing challenge to orthodox beliefs about society and the economy, and more specific developments like the anti-Liberal revolt among radicals opposed to coercion in Ireland in 1880-82, the strong land-reform agitation inspired largely by Henry George and the new ideological ferment on the London radical Left at this time.

The final section on the Radical newspaper in Chapter IV begins the detailed study of the emergence of a nascent socialist movement in this context, and its consolidation within the Democratic Federation during the period 1881-84, which is carried on through the last four chapters. These chapters deal with the foundation of the

Federation and the process by which it developed into Britain's first modern socialist organization of national significance, with special reference to the metropolitan radical milieu from which the Federation sprang and from which it drew many of its members and much of the basic ideology which it incorporated into the more-or-less Marxian form of socialism it adopted.

The main conclusion which seems to emerge from this study as a whole is that the "socialist revival" of the 1880s was not — as it is still frequently described — merely a movement of the middle-class intelligentsia. It was evidently just as much a movement of the kind of radical artisans who had shaped and preserved the traditions of Chartism and the First International, and, indeed, the continuity between the new socialism and the older popular radicalism seems in many ways as striking as the differences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No one can complete a project of this nature without help from others in many forms and over a long period of time. For their guidance and encouragement I am especially indebted to two fine historians: Dr. Peter F. Clarke of University College London, my supervisor, who has helped me immeasurably in determining the scope and approach of the thesis and steered me clear of many pitfalls into which I would otherwise surely have fallen, and Professor Peter T. Cominos of Tulane University in New Orleans, who first introduced me to the study of late-Victorian socialism and particularly to an understanding of it as one aspect of a many-sided revolt against the existing order of things which affected society and politics at every level. I am just as much indebted to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. W. E. Lincoln of Wilmington, Delaware, whom I can never adequately thank either for their generous financial help without which this project might never have been completed or for their unstinting efforts in the preparation and proofreading of the final typescript. For whatever errors and omissions remain I alone am responsible.

A final word of thanks is due to the many librarians and library assistants — especially those at University College London, the University of London Senate House, the British Museum, the British Library of Economics and Political Science and the British Museum Newspaper Library at Colindale — whose courtesy, patience and resourcefulness have smoothed my path.

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December 1976

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CHAPTER I

POPULAR RADICALISM AND SOCIALIST IDEAS IN THE 1870s

For British radical workingmen -- indeed for the general working-class movement and its sympathizers of all classes -- the beginning of the 1870s was an exciting time, one of those brief periods in which popular movements seem to take on new life and new potential. In some ways the upswing of radical and labour militance at this time seems to have foreshadowed the more sustained radical ferment of the next decade which led directly to the rise of organized socialism and independent labour politics. Thus the beginning of the seventies (although the choice of any fixed date must be at least partially arbitrary) would seem to make a good starting point for an inquiry into the extent of socialist tendencies at the grass-roots level of radical politics which may have contributed to these later developments.

Most previous accounts of the beginnings of modern socialism in Britain have had little to say about the working-class radicalism of the 1870s, apparently on the assumption that it had little to do with socialism. And it is true that the kind of definitively socialist organizations which existed by the mid-eighties did not exist a decade earlier. As E. P. Thompson has put it, there was "no consistent socialist propaganda" in the modern sense, "not even of a dozen or twenty members" to be found in Britain in the years before 1880 (although there were still some small bodies of Owenites scattered round the country, made up

mostly of "aged survivors, with little influence").[1] But this does not necessarily mean that no significant groundwork was being laid at the popular level. What we have to look for is not formal socialist organization but general working-class ideas and attitudes and specific demands and philosophies of individuals and groups on the radical Left which pointed toward socialism and helped prepare the way for the organizations which sprang up with seeming suddenness later.

Socialist leaders of the 1880s and 90s have themselves contributed to the belief that there was little of this kind of background worth noting. Often seeming to regard the mid-Victorian decades following the collapse of Chartism as something of a wasteland in the history of the working-class movement, they made statements such as Engels' reference in 1890 to the "English proletariat, newly awakened from its forty years' sleep" which were greatly oversimplified, to say the least.[2] Since then the "socialist revival" has often been viewed as largely the creation of a middle-class intelligentsia which drew its theories from European sources and imposed them on working-class colleagues who were previously ignorant of, or indifferent to, socialist ideas. But the researches of some of the post-World War II generation of labour historians, including E. P. Thompson, John Saville, E. J. Hobsbawm, Royden Harrison, Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, have shown that the older picture of a politically apathetic mid-Victorian working class accepting most of

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1 Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (1955), p. 315.

2 John Saville, "The Background to the Revival of Socialism in England," Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 11 (Autumn 1965), pp. 13-14 (Hereafter cited as Saville, "Revival of Socialism"). For more examples of similar statements by contemporaries and historians see the conclusion to Chapter VI below.

the prevailing doctrines of political economy will no longer do. Their work has also suggested the outlines, at least, of a modified picture of the beginnings of late-Victorian socialism: one in which the contribution of little-known artisan agitators operating in the milieu of the metropolitan workingmen's club, the park or street-corner meeting and the popular radical press is given full recognition for the first time.

Radical and Labour Movements in the Early 1870s: General Trends

The early 1870s is one of several periods in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to which Professor Hobsbawm has applied the concept of "explosions" of popular militance -- "periodic and sudden expansions in the size, strength and activity of social movements" coinciding with "a clustering of new organisations, and the adoption of new ideas and policies by both new and existing units."[1] A bout of high unemployment at the end of the sixties, followed by a vigorous economic recovery, helped to generate the "explosion" of the early seventies, which was marked by a number of developments in the labour movement, e.g., the Nine Hours movement for a shorter workday in the engineering industry; the extension of trade-unionism to new groups of workers, including (temporarily, at least) agricultural labourers and some of London's riverside workers; the expansion of unionism in formerly weak areas like South Wales and the North East coast; the strong Labour Laws agitation to secure full legal status for the unions; and the beginnings of serious interest in independent labour representation.[2]

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1 E. J. Hobsbawm, "Economic Fluctuations and some Social Movements since 1800," in Hobsbawm, Labouring Men (1964), p. 127.

2 Hobsbawm, Ibid.; Saville, "Revival of Socialism," p. 14; Stan Shipley, Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London (History Workshop series No. 5, Oxford, 1971), p. 52.

In the area of popular radical politics (as distinct from the labour movement per se and of more direct concern to us here) there was a similar outburst of activity, characterized by a heightened interest in social and economic questions. Central to this was a strong revival of land-reform agitation which expressed itself in 1869-70 with the founding of the militant Land and Labour League and its more moderate and middle-class rival, J. S. Mill's Land Tenure Reform Association. The more advanced elements pressing for full nationalization of the land with agricultural "Home Colonies" for the unemployed as an intermediate step (mostly radical artisans and tradesmen) found considerable common ground with the middle-class land reformers, with the result that what John Saville has called the "two traditions" of working-class and middle-class radicalism came "politically fairly close to each other" at this time and the land question remained "right in the forefront of radical politics" until the Irish rebellion and Henry George gave it still further impetus in the early eighties.[1]

Another question which for a time at least seemed equally compelling to radicals of all classes was that of republicanism. Some idea of the extent of republican sentiment among working-class radicals in the early seventies may be gained from the frequent mention of republican clubs in the radical press. For instance, the ubiquitous agitator John DeMorgan, himself the leader of a "National Republican Brotherhood" which called for social measures such as land nationalization, free education and currency and credit reform as well as a full slate of advanced

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1 Saville, "Revival of Socialism," p. 16; Saville, "Henry George and the British Labour Movement," Science and Society (New York), Vol. XXIV, (1960), p. 322; E. Eldon Barry, Nationalisation in British Politics (1965), pp. 47-56 (see the last for details of the foundation of the Land and Labour League and the LTRA and their propaganda).

political demands,[1] claimed at one point that he "had the addresses of 168 Republican Clubs" around the country and that this represented a great upsurge of interest since a few years earlier, when republicanism was "scarcely thought of" in Britain.[2]

The republicanism of the early 1870s actually existed on two fairly distinct levels. First there was the well-publicized agitation of 1871-72, mainly a short-lived political cause celebre in nature, inspired largely by the downfall of the Second Empire and the establishment of the Republic in France and led by nationally-prominent political figures including Sir Charles Dilke, Joseph Chamberlain and Auberon Herbert as well as the notorious secularist Charles Bradlaugh and the labour leader George Odger (Odger, who had sought election to Parliament as an independent "Labour" candidate in 1869, being the only one of these who did not later recant). This movement, which at its height saw riotous scenes both in Parliament and outside, particularly in reaction to speeches by Dilke, faded away quickly after the illness of the Prince of Wales and the general anti-republican reaction to the tragedy of the Paris Commune helped to turn public sentiment against it.[3]

Beneath the surface of this publicly conspicuous republican agitation, however, there was the less visible but more persistent and probably more significant development of what was sometimes called "social republicanism." Unlike the great majority of their countrymen,

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1 International Herald, 26 April 1873.

2 Report of a DeMorgan lecture at Middlesbrough on "The People's Platform," Ibid., 27 July 1872.

3 For an account by a contemporary see J. Morrison Davidson, The Annals of Toil (1899), pp. 386-390.

including more moderate republicans, the "social" republicans (who apparently adopted this term to distinguish themselves from republicans concerned only with political change)[1] considered the Commune a heroic experiment in working-class revolution, publicly expressed their solidarity with the communards and found inspiration in the recollection of their struggle for many years afterwards. "Social" republicans typically were ultra-radical artisans, some of them former Chartists, who (like DeMorgan's group mentioned above) not only wanted a republican form of government but gave at least equal priority to major social and economic demands. Their views found expression through organizations such as the International Working Men's Association (the famed "First International"), the Land and Labour League and lesser-known bodies like the National Reform League (a survival of the late-Chartist period, not to be confused with the Reform League of the 1860s which organized working-class pressure for the 1867 Reform Act) and its successor the Manhood Suffrage League, as well as newspapers like the Republican and the International Herald.

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1 It is evident from Marx's references to the term at the beginning of part III of The Civil War in France that it derives from the French revolutionary tradition, and most immediately from the slogans of the Commune in 1871 (Marx, The Paris Commune 1871, ed. Christopher Hitchens [1971], p. 91; pp. 92-3). Marx's famous essay was first published as a manifesto of the "International" in English in 1871, and occasional references to "social republicanism" may be found in the radical press up to the early 1880s when socialism or "social democracy" began to replace republicanism as a live issue. See, e.g., several notices in the International Herald during August and September 1873 declaring the intention of the editor, W. H. Riley, to start a "new series" of the failing Herald, re-naming it The Social Republican; and an article in the Republican for September 1882 (a different paper from the Republican of the early 1870s) signed by "A Social Republican" which urged the foundation of a new "social nation" in some remote part of the world, and was criticized the next month from an apparent Marxian point of view in a reply by C. J. Garcia entitled "The Real Road Before Us," which set forth the main principles of a "Universal Social Republic."

More will be said below of these organizations and journals — all of which belonged largely to the ultra-radical Left and were either dominated or strongly influenced by a small cadre of veteran agitators, disciples of the Chartist leader Bronterre O'Brien, who seem to have been the most revolutionary-minded group of native English radicals in the 1870s (and the most significant in connection with the spread of socialist ideas). First, however, some consideration should be given to the characteristic attitudes of the politically-active working class in general, as distinct from its most militant elements. "Ambivalence" is the key word where general working-class attitudes are concerned. The "Lib-Lab" alliance of moderate trade-union leaders with Gladstonian Liberalism — effectively begun in 1868 when the leaders of the Reform League put its well-developed machinery at the disposal of the Liberal Party for the general election campaign — was the dominant factor in the mainstream of working-class politics throughout the 1870s and for some years afterwards. However, as Dr. Royden Harrison's intensive research in this area has led him to conclude, the labour alliance with Liberalism was never complete or wholehearted, even on the part of the chief architects of the "Lib-Lab" policy such as W. Randal Cremer, George Howell or Robert Applegarth:

> Workmen retained the sense of their own identity and distinct interests... The policies of empiricism and compromise were always under a challenge... One can understand neither the movements nor the men of the mid-Victorian Labour Movement if the ambivalent attitudes of workmen are not understood. Liberalism at the front of the mind and old working-class sentiments and traditions at the back of it, produced the characteristic vacillations and inconsistencies: Applegarth secretly working

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[1] Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists: Studies in Labour and Politics, 1861-1881 (1965), p. 208.

> for Glyn and the Government, and at the same time valuing his membership of the International; Odger in 1868, at once party to an agreement with the Liberal Whips and yet in rebellion against it.[1]

As this suggests, it would be difficult to say with any certainty what degree of political and social militance was really typical of the rank-and-file of mid-Victorian workers. Certainly the working-class as a whole had become less disaffected and more "respectable" by the early 1870s than it was a generation earlier in the "hungry forties," but this was at least partly because times were better and it had made significant gains since then. As Engels observed after the Tory election victory of 1874 in attempting to explain why there was still no unified workers' movement with a clear set of goals, workingmen — particularly those who were skilled and organized — had indeed shared to some extent in the unprecedented prosperity of the mid-Victorian "Golden Age." Furthermore, Britain's rulers, perhaps recognizing that workers had become potentially more revolutionary if too long thwarted politically, had wisely conceded enough to take the edge off working-class militance by enfranchising the urban artisan and then granting the secret ballot. And as already noted, they had with similar effect persuaded some of the most prominent labour leaders to work politically within the Liberal fold.[2]

These observations, however, do not necessarily mean that working people uncritically accepted the prevailing orthodoxies of popularized political economy — the mechanistic view of economic activity

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1 Ibid., pp. 206-7.

2 Engels, "The English Elections," Der Volkstaat, 4 March 1874, reprinted in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels on Britain (Moscow 1953), pp. 464-470.

that lacked human dimensions; the sanctification of laissez-faire freedoms; the Malthusian population theory with its insistence on emigration as a panacea for poverty; the "iron law" of the supposedly fixed "wages fund"; the oft-claimed identity of interest between Capital and Labour. Labour historians have generally concluded that mid-Victorian workers "accepted much less of middle-class political economy than used to be assumed."[1] In regard to trade unionism, for example, it has been argued convincingly that the relative moderation of labour leaders through most of this period reflected tactical necessity rather than "bourgeois" convictions: "Trade union policy indeed seldom complied with orthodox teachings" of political economists, even though the unions "were opposed by an almost universal agreement on principles that largely denied their aims and methods."[2]

This applies specifically to trade unionists, but one receives a similar impression of the general outlook of working people from an overview of the contemporary working-class press. Some of the assumptions of orthodox political economy were sometimes accepted, particularly

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1 Saville, "Revival of Socialism," p. 14.

2 R. V. Clements, "British Trade Unions and Popular Political Economy, 1850-1875," Economic History Review, 2d ser., Vol. XIV (1961-2), p. 97; p. 104.

in the more moderate journals such as the Bee-Hive after 1870,[1] but they were more often challenged or ignored. Certain frequently-expressed attitudes seem more in harmony with later socialist views (although not in themselves definitively socialist) than with the prevailing political economy: for instance, the awareness of a conflict of class interests between Labour and Capital; the internationalist-minded sympathy with democratic and revolutionary movements abroad and condemnation of despotism, militarism and colonial exploitation; the opposition to all forms of "privilege," especially the monopoly of land and political power by the wealthier classes; the demands for the fullest political democracy, including reforms such as proportional representation and payment of M.P.s to open the way for working-class representation; the conviction that labour was the true source of value and that working people were being denied a fair share of the wealth they created (it was still mainly landowners who were accused of "robbing" the workers, however; "capitalists" were sometimes attacked as "moneylords," but not often in their role as industrial employers).

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[1] It should be noted that the Bee-Hive, which had served as the principle press organ of the IWMA General Council through most of the middle and later sixties, became so moderate in 1870 under its new editor, the Rev. Henry Solly, a Unitarian clergyman, that the council permanently severed relations with it on the ground that it was no longer a working-class organ. The council turned next to an East London radical weekly, The Eastern Post, and then to the International Herald: For further details see Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement: Years of the First International (1965), p. 175. As Marx complained, the Bee-Hive under Solly indeed "preached harmony with the capitalists" in contradiction to the International's policy; a statement in the 19 February 1870 number promised, for instance, that the paper would devote itself to "reconciling Labour and Capital" and would "never be found promoting class animosities."

To a greater or lesser degree these attitudes found expression in most papers aimed at working-class readers as well as in pamphlet literature and lectures and debates at working-men's clubs. One of the most popular journals, and perhaps the one which represented the broadest spectrum of working-class opinion at the beginning of the 1870s, was Reynolds's Newspaper. The more extreme radical journals offered a somewhat more coherent or structured critique of existing society and a more consistent set of positive demands, but Reynolds's, too, expressed the kind of militant class-consciousness that helped create a climate of working-class opinion in which socialist ideas, and ultimately an organized socialist movement, could take root. It frequently printed demands for land nationalization and independent labour representation (although no clear proposal for a separate working-class party), and it uncompromisingly attacked the typical attitudes of the middle and upper classes toward workers and the poor. Unlike the milder Bee-Hive, which was supporting emigration as the cure for unemployment due to supposed "over-population," Reynolds's denounced it as a "reckless deportation" of skilled, industrious artisans who ranked among Britain's worthiest citizens.[1] It regarded the royal family as useless "costly creatures" living in unmerited luxury while unemployed workers starved, and it vigorously attacked militarism and colonialism everywhere. It told workers not to expect any real progress from political co-operation with the dominant classes: "Emancipation from political thraldom," it maintained, "can only be achieved by [workers] themselves... upper and middle-class support is nothing better than mockery and moonshine."[2]

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[1] Reynolds's Newspaper, 20 February 1870.

[2] Ibid.

For all its crusading against royalty, "privilege," landlordism and patronizing middle-class attitudes, Reynolds's had no coherent programme, socialist or otherwise (although occasional contributors advocated Owenite-style co-operative communities); the paper served instead as a forum for a wide range of proposals as varied as the individual crotchets of each contributor.

Nevertheless, it was largely because of the prevalence of views like those expressed in Reynolds's, as well as the existence of more extreme positions on the ultra-radical Left, that John Stuart Mill became convinced in his last years that working-class pressures for social justice would inevitably bring socialism to the forefront of political debate in Britain, as was already happening in other countries. Mill accordingly began writing a book on socialism in 1869 with a view toward showing how the best ideas of socialist thinkers might be applied to the existing social system in order to improve it without "unnecessary disturbance." Mill died in 1873 before the book was finished, but in 1879 his stepdaughter, Helen Taylor, published "the first rough drafts thrown down" in the course of the uncompleted work.[1]

Mill believed that although most working-class leaders in Britain were "better aware than their Continental brethren that great and permanent changes in the fundamental ideas of mankind are not to be accomplished

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[1] See J. S. Mill, "Chapters on Socialism," Fortnightly Review, Vol. 25 (1879), pp. 217-237, 373-382 and 513-530. The quoted words are from Helen Taylor's prefatory note. Mill's analysis of socialism was evidently based mainly on a study of the French socialists Louis Blanc and Fourier and on Robert Owen. He does not mention Marx or Lassalle directly, although he does dismiss the idea of centralized state socialism instituted suddenly by a popular revolutionary movement as doomed to failure (p. 526).

by a sudden coup de main," the socialist theories of speculative thinkers would nevertheless provide the basis for the "popular political creeds" of the coming generation. He saw early signs of this in the tendency of radical workingmen to question the basic legitimacy of the system of private property and private enterprise, or at least some aspects of it. Many workers believed that wages should not be governed by the "freedom of contract" principle; the "more aspiring" denied the justice of private ownership of land and had "commenced an agitation for its resumption by the State"; and some agitators had combined with these ideas "a denunciation of what they term usury" in which Mill saw the influence of continental socialists "who object to all interest on money, and deny the legitimacy of receiving an income in any form from property apart from labour." Only a few in Britain held views this extreme, but Mill was convinced that the soil here was "well prepared to receive the seeds of this description" which were being scattered from Europe. He confidently predicted that as workingmen began to understand the full potential of the electoral power given them by the Reform Act of 1867, a powerful independent labour political movement would emerge; that it would pursue working-class aims through the existing "legal and constitutional machinery"; and that these aims, as yet poorly defined, would be brought into

clearer focus by the application of socialist ideas.[1]

Another contemporary observer who shared Mill's impression of a growing tendency among working people to question the basic legitimacy of existing social and economic arrangements was Thomas Wright, who interpreted working-class attitudes for middle and upper-class readers in several books and articles published under the pen-name "Journeyman Engineer." In July 1871, shortly after the fall of the Paris Commune, Wright warned that the short-lived revolution in Paris and its tragic end had significantly fueled the spirit of rebellion among English workers. Wright claimed that although most workers had "no particular sympathy" with the more theoretical revolutionary ideas of the Communards, many admired their stand against militarism and despotism and "entertained a warm and very decided sympathy" with them as brave martyrs to "the general cause of the unprivileged against the privileged

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1 Ibid., pp. 218-221. Mill himself rejected what he called the exaggerations" of socialism, but held in good utilitarian fashion that the "intellectual and moral grounds of socialism" might often provide the "guiding principles" for improving "the present economic system of society." He felt that property rights in particular would have to be considerably modified "for the sake of social justice and social peace" (ibid., p. 382; pp. 526-530). Very helpful on Mill's personal attitudes toward socialism and his influence in preparing the British intellectual Left for the acceptance of socialist ideas is Willard Wolfe, From Radicalism to Socialism: Men and Ideas in the Formation of Fabian Socialist Doctrines, 1881-89 (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1975). Describing both Mill's specific proposals for land, tax and education reforms and his "propagation of a genuinely 'social' point of view" as aspects of an "attempt to fuse Radical and Socialist values into a new and more balanced social faith," Wolfe argues that the importance of Mill's thought as an "intellectual bridge" between radicalism and socialism (especially Fabian socialism) has never been properly appreciated (pp. 30-31; p. 52)

classes."[1] He believed that this sympathy had only been intensified by the hostile and biased attitude of the British Government and most of the British Press -- especially by their approval of the "cold-blooded murdering of the Communist prisoners without any form of trial."[2]

Wright's observation of strong pro-Commune sympathies among working people is amply confirmed by the radical press, although it would be difficult to say how widespread this was beyond the ranks of advanced radicals who not only sympathized with the Commune but fully supported its revolutionary aims. The most noteworthy public demonstration in support of the Commune, organized by a group called the

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1 T. Wright, "The English Working Classes and the Paris Commune," Fraser's Magazine, July 1871, reprinted in Royden Harrison, ed., The English Defence of the Commune (1971), pp. 133-135; 140-141. This volume gathers together the major writings of the English Positivists on the Commune, as well as some examples of its support by working-class radicals and its influence on their thinking. Particularly noteworthy among the latter are the Letters on the Commune by Thomas Smith of Nottingham, founder and leading spirit of the Nottingham branch of the IWMA, who attempted to construct a coherent theory of political and social revolution on the basis of the principles of decentralization and federalism which had inspired the Commune. For a full account of the Positivists and their efforts to "moralize" the capitalist system, emphasizing the importance of their contribution to the trade union movement and to the spreading of ideas compatible with socialism, see Royden Harrison, Before the Socialists, as well as Harrison's introduction to English Defence of the Commune and his article "Professor Beesly and the Working-Class Movement," in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History (1960).

2 T. Wright, loc. cit. A similar reaction to Government and Press condemnation of the Commune also occurred among a few middle-class renegades who later became leaders of British socialism and in their reminiscences cited the Commune as a major early influence in setting them on the path toward socialist convictions. See, e.g., the articles by H. M. Hyndman and E. Belfort Bax in the "How I Became a Socialist" series in Justice (19 May 1894 and 9 June 1894 respectively; the whole series was also published separately in pamphlet form); Hyndman, The Record of an Adventurous Life (1911), pp. 157-8; and Bax, Reminiscences and Reflections of a Mid and Late Victorian (1918), pp. 28-30.

"International Democratic Association" with the co-operation of the IWMA General Council, took place in Hyde Park on 16 April 1871.[1] The size and success of the demonstration apparently depended on the political sympathies of the newspaper reporting it; the friendly Republican claimed that there were "not less" than six to seven thousand present, but the Times found the numbers thin and dismissed the event as a failure.[2] The highlight of the meeting, in any case, was the reading of an address of fraternal greeting to the Communards, who at this date were still in control of Paris. It praised them in the strongest possible terms as men who were fighting for a cause no less than "the liberty of the world and the regeneration of mankind ... the Universal Republic, democratic and social," resisting the "cowardly and mercenary instruments of European despots" and opposing the "exploitation of the wealth producers of all countries" by the privileged classes. The address also described the principles of the Commune as a "glorious resurrection" of the first French Republic's Constitution of 1793.[3]

The language of the address suggests a mingling of socialist views with the traditional democratic ideals harking back to the days

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1 The International Democratic Association was a small group made up mostly of veteran Chartist and Owenite agitators (many of them O'Brienites) and members of the former London French branch of the IWMA, a dissident group which had been expelled by the parent body some time earlier but had continued to claim association with it. The two bodies co-operated on this occasion largely because of pressure from O'Brienites on the IWMA General Council. For further details, including the reasons for the General Council's failure otherwise to speak out for the Commune until after its fall, see Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement, pp. 194-5.

2 Republican, 1 May 1871; Times, 17 April 1871.

3 Reynolds's Newspaper, 23 April 1871.

of the French Revolution and Tom Paine. This mingling of old and new traditions is equally obvious in the Republican's commentary on the demonstration; it described the Parisian workers as "battling for the 'Rights of Man' against the 'Might' of men that robs them of their natural inheritance by a carefully contrived system which elevates the few and degrades the many."[1]

A year after its fall (and for long after that in the more advanced radical circles), accounts of the Commune continued to provoke a strong emotional response from working-class audiences and remained a favourite topic on the radical-club lecture circuit. One typical report from a club correspondent describes a March 1872 lecture to the Mile End branch of the Land and Labour League by a participant in the Commune as commencing with "a graphic description of the first siege" and showing "how the poor and the working-class suffered from want of the necessities of life while the rich and the middle-class enjoyed their usual luxuries." The correspondent, and presumably the rest of the audience, judged the lecture "a powerful vindication of the Commune."[2] A more detailed report of a June, 1872 meeting of the "Universal Republican League, Section 3" at a pub near Leicester Square describes the reaction of the audience to a similar address in these words:

> Several officers of the army of the Commune... related what they had witnessed this week last year, when the troops of Versailles took Paris and butchered every workman they could clutch. These horrible massacres were spoken

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1 Republican, 1 May 1871.

2 International Herald, 16 March 1872.

> of with so much feeling that the audience was thrilled with emotion, and the clenched fists and moistened eyes of many present seemed to indicate that there were men in England who would not be far behind their brothers in France should we unfortunately be driven to such extremities.[1]

It was this kind of reaction, repeated many times over on similar occasions during and just after the Commune's brief life, that led the "Journeyman Engineer," Thomas Wright, to warn his readers that sympathy for the Commune was the manifestation of a "dangerous" attitude developing among British workers which "if not exorcised ... may come to mean social destruction." Wright claimed that while few workers had any definite revolutionary philosophy, the failure of political concessions like the repeal of the Corn Laws or the extension of the franchise to materially improve their way of life had "embittered" many against the existing social system:

> They say now ... that it is mere frittering to be struggling for Acts of Parliament, that what is wanted is a thorough change. If asked what change they would be unable to give any definite answer ... they scarcely care ... In this frame of mind they are likely to grasp at any specious plan that promised ... revolutionary changes beneficial to them ... One fixed idea, however, they have ... They believe that before they can rise the class which is composed of the rich, the titled, and the privileged must be brought down, and the power of governing and lawmaking wrested from them. They have come to be of the opinion that between that class and their own there is a natural and deadly antagonism.[2]

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1 Ibid., 1 June 1872.

2 T. Wright, loc. cit.

Such strong animosity toward the dominant classes was probably not as widespread as Wright's article seems to imply — it would be natural enough for him to overstate his case somewhat so as to more effectively titillate his comfortable readers with the spectre of revolution — but there is certainly ample evidence that the feeling of belonging to an "unprivileged" class whose interests were opposed and overridden by those of the "privileged" classes was fairly general among workingmen, and that the kind of unfocused revolutionary sentiment Wright described was not uncommon.

But was this revolutionary sentiment always so unfocused? Labour historians, finding mid-Victorian radicalism a rather vague and diffuse affair in comparison with late-Victorian socialism, have often emphasized the inconsistency and eclecticism of radical demands; Henry Pelling, for instance, has stated flatly that there was "no distinctive labour political creed" before the 1880s[1] and John Saville has stressed "the absence of a structured and coherent philosophy of society" among radical workingmen.[2]

This view can hardly be challenged in regard to the working-class movement in its broader sense, including the major trade unions and the general run of Liberal-oriented radical clubs; yet at least where the more extreme radicals are concerned it seems to miss or gloss over something which may be important in connection with the rise of socialism: Although the views of extreme radicals varied greatly in detail (just as did those of different schools of socialists at a later date), there

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1 Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900 (2d ed., 1965), p. 6.

2 Saville, "Revival of Socialism," p. 14.

nevertheless seems to be a consistent pattern to their principal demands which reflects a reasonably coherent philosophy with considerable socialist tendencies.

In the most "advanced" newspapers of the 1870s, in some of the pamphlet literature which was being read and discussed in the workingmen's radical clubs, and in the proposals of organizations like the IWMA or the Land and Labour League, certain demands crop up so often that they form in effect a fairly definite programme for the section of radicals who considered themselves "Social Republicans." In summary, this "programme" called for a republican form of government with the fullest political democracy; for the development of independent working-class political power, not as an end in itself but as a means to social equality; for the ending of the "monopoly of land and money" by the "privileged" classes; and for various measures which would give ordinary workers access to this land and capital as a means of securing "the full fruits of their labour," either as individuals or members of co-operative communities. These measures usually included "Home Colonization" and the nationalization of the land and other natural resources, and sometimes a nationalized system of credit and a new national currency which was to be based on labour instead of precious metals as the measure of value. Other typical demands included free, secular education, the free administration of justice, Church disestablishment, public ownership of certain utilities and many more miscellaneous social reforms.

Enough has been said earlier to indicate that many workingmen and a number of radical organizations supported at least some of these demands, but there was really only one group which consistently advocated all of them, welding them together in a structured theory of

social revolution. These were the disciples of Bronterre O'Brien, the "schoolmaster" of Chartism, and their involvement seems to have been the common denominator of nearly all organizations and movements in the 1870s which showed leanings toward socialism. Their theory did not have the complexity and logical consistency of Marxism, nor was it ever set forth in an intellectual treatise comparable to Capital, but it bears further examination as a significant influence in the development of modern British socialism.

CHAPTER II

THE O'BRIENITES AND SOCIALISM

The followers of Bronterre O'Brien, a Soho-based cadre of artisans and small tradesmen, were in the vanguard of British working-class radicalism throughout the mid-Victorian period. Their role as a distinct school of thought in the popular radical politics of the period has rarely been sufficiently recognized. More than any other identifiable group, these men — mostly boot and shoe makers, tailors, cabinet-makers, compositors and the like, self-educated and uncommonly dedicated to the idea of working-class emancipation — served as a living link between the Chartism of the 1840s and the new socialism of the 1880s. They came together in the National Reform League, founded by O'Brien in 1849, and some of them helped to start the Social-Democratic Federation and steer it toward a definite socialist position in the early eighties. Until the early nineties they continuously maintained an organization of their own which served as a forum for all sorts of radicals and revolutionists, including European political exiles — first the National Reform League with headquarters at the "Eclectic Hall" in Denmark Street, Soho, which they carried on for ten years after O'Brien's death in 1864; then (after a brief period of working with more moderate trade unionists in a society called the Democratic and Trades Alliance) the Manhood Suffrage League, which met in the club rooms of two successive Soho pubs, the "Queen's Head" in Little Pulteney Street and the "Three Doves" in Berwick Street.

There was nothing very formal or exclusive about these small political societies; O'Brienites simply were the predominant influence in

them. There is no evidence that members had to adhere to a specific set of doctrines or a point-by-point programme. Not all the members were O'Brienites, or even necessarily as politically advanced as the O'Brienites, and the weekly lectures might be given by anyone from inside or outside the circle of members and friends who had something to say that could provoke a good debate and advance the political education of the audience, including non-member workingmen who might have been attracted to a meeting by one of the notices regularly placed in the radical press. Similarly, O'Brienites were often to be found giving lectures or taking part in the debates at other workingmen's clubs all over London, and O'Brienite ideas, if not the O'Brienites themselves, were well represented in republican clubs, IWMA branches and similar groups around the country. The actual personal followers of O'Brien were never a large group -- perhaps no more than a few dozen key individuals -- but they seem to have been active in virtually every advanced movement or organization that offered them the chance to spread their mentor's teachings and further the cause of social revolution.

A detailed description of the role played by the O'Brienites and their political societies in metropolitan radical politics, with many illustrations drawn from the radical press and other contemporary sources, may be found in Stan Shipley's local study of London workingmen's clubs, Club Life and Socialism in Mid-Victorian London. Other works dealing

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1 History Workshop series, No. 5, Oxford, 1971 (see esp. the chapters on "The Soho O'Brienites" and The Manhood Suffrage League"). Except for a few pamphlets and reminiscences, the best contemporary sources on the O'Brienites are the short notices in the club columns of radical newspapers (Bradlaugh's National Reformer in the 1870s and early 80s is especially good for these) and occasional longer reports of special activities involving them. Mr. Shipley has traced the O'Brienites over a long period through these sources and in so doing has contributed much to our knowledge of the vanished political culture to which they belonged, the "metropolitan clubland" of the Victorian artisan.

with mid-Victorian popular radicalism also contain scattered references to the O'Brienites as a group and to the Murray brothers, Martin Boon, W. H. Riley, G. E. Harris, Richard Butler and other prominent members of their circle, often in connection with the IWMA or the Land and Labour League.[1] In the present context there is no need for a full account of the O'Brienites' activities and the institutional development of the organizations they dominated or influenced (and in any case, much of this information can be pieced together from the works just cited). What is more to the point here is the nature of their influence within the metropolitan radical milieu of the 1870s and the extent to which it may have helped prepare the way for the socialist movement which later took root in this setting. In order to determine how far O'Brienism may have foreshadowed modern socialism we need to look more closely at the O'Brienite version of the social revolution.

Frank Kitz, a London-born workingman of German descent who began a lifelong career as a revolutionary by joining the O'Brienite circle in 1874, praised these men — his first political tutors — as having been among the few in Britain "to represent and uphold Socialism" at this time.[2] Kitz looked upon these veterans of the Chartist struggle — men who had been associated with Robert Owen, Ernest Jones, Feargus O'Connor, William Lovett and other revered leaders as well as Bronterre O'Brien — with an awe and respect that never faded. When Kitz in his turn had

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1 See esp. E. E. Barry, Nationalisation in British Politics, Chapter II; H. Collins and C. Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement, and for background on O'Brien's own career and the National Reform League, as well as an appendix containing brief biographical sketches of some of his disciples, Alfred Plummer, Bronterre: A Political Biography of Bronterre O'Brien, 1804-1864 (1971).

2 Kitz, "Recollections and Reflections," Freedom, January 1912.

become an old campaigner, he recalled them fondly in his memoirs and singled out some of them for special mention -- for example, William Townshend, "a tall, gaunt, kindly old shoemaker, the possessor of a vast accumulation of books and knowledge pertaining to the cause"; the brothers Charles and James Murray, probably the most active agitators in the group, who took part in "every movement from the Chartist onwards"; John Bedford Leno, "the Buckinghamshire poet, who struck at the landlord system in rhyme and verse"; or John Rogers, Soho tailor, Chartist pioneer and "friend of Karl Marx."[1] Rogers, president of the Manhood Suffrage League when he died in 1877, had been a foundation member of the London Working Men's Association which drew up the People's Charter in 1836; Marx was among the group of friends and associates who attended his funeral.[2] Townshend and the Murray brothers became founder-members of the Democratic Federation, as did others in the MSL, and served it actively through most of the 1880s; James Murray was one of the signers of its first socialist manifesto, Socialism Made Plain, in 1883.[3]

Kitz went so far as to describe the members of the Manhood Suffrage League as "the chief actors in bringing about the revival of socialism and laying the foundations of the present movement"[4] -- and this would be no exaggeration if Kitz had said they were among the "chief actors," which is probably what he meant, judging from the whole of his memoirs.

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1 Ibid., February 1912.

2 Shipley, Club Life, p. 4.

3 More will be said of the O'Brienites' role in the Federation -- after 1884 the Social-Democratic Federation -- in later chapters.

4 Kitz in Freedom, February 1912.

But whether the O'Brienites themselves can properly be labeled "socialists" is really a question of how broadly one defines the term. In a reference to the prevalence of O'Brienite doctrines in the local IWMA branches formed around Britain in 1871-2, Henry Collins and Chimen Abramsky have described O'Brien's followers as "the only coherent body of socialists in England at the time." Similarly, in referring to the affiliation of the National Reform League with the IWMA in 1866, they characterize the League as "the only society in Britain to maintain, in the period between the decline of Chartism and the socialist revival of the 1880s, a consistent propaganda in favour of socialism, albeit of the O'Brienite variety."[1]

In its basic aims, at least, O'Brienism was quite compatible with the socialism of the 1880s and 90s: In essence, the O'Brienites sought to teach their fellow workingmen to use their political rights to the fullest in order to secure their social emancipation, and tried to inspire them with a vision of the independence and security they would enjoy as masters of their own economic lives, freed from "wage slavery" to capitalists and landlords. As Collins and Abramsky point out, however, the "O'Brienite variety" of socialism lacked one of the most characteristic features of the movement as it later developed in Britain: The O'Brienites did not demand the nationalization of all the major means of production, distribution and exchange, only some of them — principally the land, the banking and credit system and everything in the nature of a public utility. Even where they did call for nationalization, this did not necessarily imply centralized state management. In other respects,

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[1] Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx and the British Labour Movement, p. 252; p. 73.

too, such as their broader definition of a "working man" and their preoccupation with credit and currency reform, their focus differed markedly from that of the later socialism.

Many of the differences seem to arise from the fact that the O'Brienites paid relatively little attention to heavy industry and the factory system (perhaps because most of them, living in London and working at traditional, "pre-industrial" trades, had not had much contact with it; and because — as was the case with so many urban reformers of all classes and shades of opinion — their social ideal was basically an agrarian one). When they spoke out against the "capitalist" they were usually thinking of the financier or "moneylord" more than the industrialist. They did not so much seek to destroy the capitalist industrial system as to bypass it — to make it possible for working people to live outside it by abolishing the monopolies, principally of land and money, that kept them trapped within it. The O'Brienites sought a society in which ordinary artisans and labourers, either on their own or in communal groups, would have the option of combining a craft with some land to establish an independent livelihood with full control of the things they produced, which they could exchange for whatever they needed at a system of state-run markets where all goods would be valued in terms of the labour that went into them.

O'Brienism was not Marxism, but neither Bronterre O'Brien nor his followers needed any lessons from Marx in such basic concepts as the conflict of class interests under capitalism, worker-created "surplus value" as the source of profits, or the value of working-class political independence as a step toward social emancipation. In 1854, for example, Charles Murray was quoting from O'Brien's writings to demonstrate that

the "capability of working men to produce a surplus over and above their own consumption" was the sole source of "the enormous incomes annually received by capitalists and traders, under the name of Profits."[1] There is good reason to believe, as O'Brien's biographer suggests, that Marx may have learned from O'Brien; in other words, that O'Brien's writings of the 1830s and 40s must have formed part of the material from which Marx developed his own analysis of society.[2]

To fully appreciate the position of the O'Brienites in relation to both the working-class radicalism of the 1870s and the new socialism of the 1880s it is necessary to understand the system of social thought and closely inter-related reform proposals worked out by O'Brien many years earlier, for few of his followers ever strayed far from it despite the diversity of the movements in which they took part. Right from the beginning of his career as the "political schoolmaster" of the Chartist era,[3] O'Brien attacked "the tyrant Capital" for enslaving the working class and taking away most of the wealth it produced. Addressing the Second Co-operative Congress at Birmingham in 1831, he cited the statistics of Colquhoun (in much the same way as the socialists of a half-century later cited other statistics) to demonstrate that working people were "robbed" by the profit system of "at least four-fifths of their earnings," and further pointed out that they were constantly at risk of

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1 C. Murray, A Letter to Mr. George Jacob Holyoake (1854), pp. 8-9.

2 Plummer, Bronterre, pp. 249-253.

3 O'Brien is described as "The Political Schoolmaster of the Age" in the National Union (organ of the O'Brienite-dominated National Political Union for the Obtainment of the People's Charter), 6 October 1858, quoted ibid., p. 240.

losing their livelihood altogether during an economic downturn:

> Their labour is held in servile subjection by a tyrant called Capital, who suspends as well as expands production at pleasure ... There is no escaping from this tyrant Capital: he is an essential element in every work of enterprise. No matter what may be a man's abilities, or industry ... he can do nothing without the capitalist ... When the capitalist wants him, he keeps him hard at work twelve or fourteen hours a day, for just as much as keeps him alive and able to resume his work next day, and when the speculator's convenience no longer requires it, he sends the wretch away, telling him to go and starve for a fortnight or so. Can this be called a rational form of society?[1]

As far as remedies were concerned, on this occasion O'Brien spoke only in general terms of the principle of Co-operation as a means by which workers could create "a Union of capital and labour amongst themselves" in order to "secure permanent independence for all," and warned that the expected reform of Parliament could "effect little good, except in so far as it may conduce to a reform in the construction of society."[2] But in his early contributions to the radical press during the same period (while he was still in his twenties) O'Brien spelled out quite plainly the conviction which would always remain the cornerstone of his strategy: that independent political power was the essential first step toward working-class social emancipation. He called for political reforms that would "invest the productive classes with real legislative power" which they could use to "make whatever changes they might think necessary" in order to gain control of both the land and the

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1 Proceedings of the Second Co-operative Congress (1831), pp. 19-20. A copy is available at Goldsmiths' Library, University of London.

2 Ibid.

"machinery and scientific power of the nation" and retain for themselves the wealth they produced. At this time (1831), when the working class still entirely lacked direct legislative power, O'Brien was less concerned than later with the exact form these changes might take. But in general terms he looked toward the constitutional use of this power, once it had become a reality, to "gradually prepare the way for the adoption of the social or co-operative system."[1]

It is important to understand, however, that O'Brien's attacks upon the capitalist economic system and his emphasis upon working-class political power as a means of reforming it in the "social or co-operative" direction did not mean that he envisioned the direct establishment of a socialist state by a worker-dominated revolutionary government. In O'Brien's view no government could successfully impose a socialist or communist system by law; If it were to come at all it must come as a spontaneous, voluntary growth after the people had first been "put in possession of ... their real social and political rights." O'Brien defined these rights and explained his position on the whole matter in his 1850 pamphlet State Socialism!! In the first section of this, entitled "For What are we Striving?" he criticized "our modern Socialists, both in England and on the Continent" for failing to see any intermediate course between preserving the existing system and "abolishing private property altogether."[2] The kind of socialism O'Brien was referring to — and he obviously doubted its practicability under any circumstances despite his

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1 Plummer, Bronterre, pp. 36-7. The phrases quoted directly are from several articles by O'Brien published during 1831 in William Carpenter's Political Letter.

2 O'Brien, State Socialism!!, p. 8. (I have used an undated edition published about 1880, which may be seen at Goldsmiths' Library, University of London).

statement that he had "no objection ... to any form of socialism" on principle — was that which would attempt to force everyone into Owenite-style co-operative communities. He was speaking specifically here "not only of Mr. Owen's followers, but also of the Fourierists, and of every sect and shade of the French communists and socialists." He asserted that their remedy

> is practically no remedy at all, inasmuch as, if we had possession of the government tomorrow, we should have neither the right nor the power to apply it. No government has a right to compel people to live in communities if they do not like it, nor to tax one portion of the public to enable another portion to live in parallelograms on the principle of co-operative labour and common property, nor indeed upon any other principle ... All we have a right to expect from the best of governments is to hold the scales evenly and dispense equal justice and protection to all classes, — in other words, to restore to us, and secure us in the plentitude of our social and political rights. Having obtained this much from government, it is our business to do the rest for ourselves.[1]

The rights to which O'Brien referred included, on the political side, all the basic civil liberties essential to a free people as well as the "right to self-government in every department of the State" through a fully democratic system of representation. The principle social rights of the people were defined by O'Brien as (1) "their right to the use of land, and of all the raw materials of wealth above or below the earth's surface," which were to be gradually resumed by the State as the existing proprietors died off, with compensation to their heirs; (2) "their right to a share of the public credit of the State" in the form of loans or advances from the public funds enabling them "to stock and crop the

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[1] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

lands rented from the state, or to manufacture on their own account" -- in other words, "their right to be taken out of a state of bondage to landlords and capitalists, and to be enabled to produce and enjoy on their own account, without being obliged to ask others for leave to live"; and (3) their right to "an equitable system of commercial exchange" by which they could trade amongst themselves through the medium of a paper currency having no connection with gold, "and be at all times able to get equal value for value, by the mere presentation of the paper symbol."[1]

The specific reforms designed to realize these "social rights" -- which O'Brien and his followers liked to describe as "a few honest laws upon Land, Credit, Currency and Exchange"[2] -- are set forth in the second part of State Socialism!! as the "Propositions of the National Reform League," a set of resolutions drafted by O'Brien and adopted by the League and various other bodies (including the National Charter Association) in 1850. The resolutions begin with the immediate relief of poverty and unemployment. The first demands reform of the Poor Law so that "beneficial employment and relief" would be "liberally administered, as a right, and not grudgingly doled out" with the accompaniment of "harsh and degrading conditions" that converted "relief into punishment." The second calls upon the government to purchase lands for "the location thereon of the unemployed poor." No details of how the resettlement would work are given here, but this was the germ of what later came to be called "Home Colonization" and was demanded by both radicals and

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1 Ibid., pp. 6-7

2 O'Brien in the Reformer, 21 July 1849, quoted in Murray, Letter to G. J. Holyoake, p. 9.

socialists for many years as a counter to emigrationist schemes. The third proposal calls for the cessation of all taxation of the "industrious classes" for purposes of discharging the National Debt, on the ground that "the debt was not borrowed by them, nor for them, nor with their consent."[1]

The remaining four proposals, dealing with land, credit, currency and exchange in that order and in close relationship to one another, constituted the real heart of the O'Brienite economic programme, the "few honest laws" which were to become the basis of a just and nonviolent social revolution. The land proposal specifies "the gradual resumption by the State (on the acknowledged principles of equitable compensation to existing holders or their heirs) of ... sole proprietorship over all the lands, mines, turbaries, fisheries etc., of the United Kingdom and our colonies; the same to be held by the State, as trustees, in perpetuity, for the entire people" and be rented out to either individuals or groups on terms to be determined in detail by "the law and local circumstances." There is nothing in the proposal that necessarily implies direct management of these resources by the state, but it anticipates Henry George by many years in providing that the rents paid to the State should take the place of all existing forms of taxation; O'Brien believed that the "national fund" so formed would be "adequate to defray all charges of the public service, execute all needful public works, and educate the population, without the necessity for any taxation."[2]

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[1] State Socialism!!, pp. 3-4.

[2] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

The next demand, for a "sound system of National Credit," follows logically from nationalization of the land, for this would be of little value to the ordinary workingman unless he could readily obtain the capital to rent some land and put it under cultivation instead of remaining subject to "the injustice and tyranny of wages-slavery." This "National Credit" system, however, was not intended merely for the benefit of prospective small farmers, for it would be open to "individuals, companies and communities in all other branches of useful industry as well as in agriculture."[1]

Following the "National Credit" proposal is the demand for a "National Currency" based upon "real, consumeable wealth, or on the bona fide credit of the State, and not upon the variable and uncertain amount of scarce metals." O'Brien believed that the existing gold-based currency, because it was variable in supply and had intrinsic value in itself, fostered "a vicious trade in money and a ruinous practice of commercial gambling and speculation" which made it "wholly inadequate to perform the functions of equitably representing and distributing" the national wealth and maintaining the balance between production and consumption that was necessary to avoid periodic economic crises.[2] O'Brien's ideas on currency reform are, in truth, too complex for satisfactory brief summary. But generally speaking, he wanted a paper currency based on the labour theory of value, i.e., symbolizing the actual labour-content of commodities, which would not be subject to

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[1] Ibid., p. 5.

[2] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

monopoly by the "moneylords" of the world of private banking and finance.[1]

The final demand -- nicely complementing the currency proposal -- is for a new national system of exchange which would operate, under State supervision, completely outside the existing profit system. O'Brien, arguing that the profit system produced "a monstrous amount of evil, by maintaining a large class living on the profits made by the mere sale of goods, on the demoralizing principle of buying cheap and selling dear," specified that it should become the duty of the State "to institute in every town and city, public marts or stores, for the reception of all kinds of exchangeable goods, to be valued by disinterested officers appointed for the purpose, either upon a corn or a labour standard." Depositors of goods would then receive notes enabling them to draw goods worth an equivalent amount from similar markets anywhere in the country, "thereby gradually displacing the present reckless system of competitive trading and shopkeeping."[2]

In a concluding note on "other needful reforms" which he thought would be "easy of accomplishment" once these major proposals had been put into effect, O'Brien also alluded briefly to "the expropriation of railways, canals, bridges, docks, gas-works, etc.," i.e., the nationalization of the means of transport and communication and everything in the

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1 Perhaps the clearest brief description of the kind of currency desired by O'Brien and his followers is John Ruskin's definition of "National Money," quoted approvingly by W. H. Riley in the International Herald, 1 June 1872: "a documentary promise, ratified and guaranteed by the nation, to give or find a certain quantity of labour, or the results of labour, on demand." O'Brien envisioned stamped notes representing so many hours, days, weeks, etc. of labour, but never solved the problem of how to fairly represent different kinds and qualities of labour (Plummer, Bronterre, pp. 207-210).

2 State Socialism!!, p. 6.

nature of a public utility. As he explained in more detail elsewhere, he believed that facilities of this sort, like the land and other natural resources, properly belonged to the whole public and should not be subject to monopolistic control by "private speculators, for whom they are only a legal disguise to enable them to rob the public."[1]

It will be seen that the various items in the O'Brienite economic programme added up to a considerable degree of State intervention, following from the basic proposition that the working class must capture and use the great potential power of the positive State to transform social and economic institutions to whatever extent necessary to ensure decent living and working conditions and a fair share of the national wealth for all. Although O'Brien's proposals stopped short of the nationalization of industry, there is no indication that he would have opposed this on principle if he had thought it necessary to set workers free from the system of competitive profiteering which he hated as passionately as any socialist. He apparently believed his own proposals for the nationalization of land, credit and the instruments of commerce were sufficient in themselves to accomplish this end, leaving co-operative production as a truly viable option without making it an enforced requirement. O'Brien, then, was neither an "English Socialist" in the Utopian tradition of the Owenites nor a "scientific" socialist of the Marxian school. But his ideas were in many ways compatible with the modern British tradition of democratic socialism — sufficiently so that some of his younger followers were able to take part in the

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1 O'Brien, The Rise, Progress and Phases of Human Slavery (1885), p. 144, quoted in Shipley, Club Life, p. 11.

movement of the 1880s which established this tradition while still maintaining their O'Brienite identity and flavouring their propaganda for the new socialism with the distinctively O'Brienite doctrines on "land, credit, currency and exchange."

Charles Murray and the "Enemy" Middle Class

One O'Brienite who made the transition to socialism was Charles Murray, probably the most militantly class-conscious and revolutionary-minded of all O'Brien's followers. Murray was a lifelong resident of Soho, except for a fifteen-month period in 1871-2 which he spent in Kansas working with a co-operative colony of O'Brienite emigrants who were attempting to put their mentor's principles into practical operation.[1] An active Chartist from his youth, Murray was acquainted with Feargus O'Connor and Robert Owen as well as O'Brien, but his views were formed principally through his long and close friendship with O'Brien. Murray and his brother James began to become prominent in Soho radical circles in the early 1850s, when Charles served as secretary and James as treasurer of the Soho Chartist Locality. After O'Brien's death in 1864, Charles Murray emerged as one of the best-known and most ceaselessly active O'Brienite propagandists. A boot-closer by trade (they stitched the uppers, usually working at home in Murray's time) and the most prominent member of his union, the West End Boot Closers' Society, Murray was also a well-known figure in London trade-union circles. A long-serving member of the IWMA General Council, Murray convinced his

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[1] See Shipley, Club Life, pp. 80-83 for the story of the O'Brienite "Mutual Emigration and Co-operative Colonization Company" so far as it can be traced from British sources — which mysteriously give no indication of the fate of the colony after 1874.

union to affiliate with the International in 1869 and participate actively in its affairs.[1]

Murray's desire for a social revolution was firmly based on a class-conflict analysis of the existing social system. Of all O'Brien's followers Murray seems to have been the most vehement on the subject of the middle class as the enemy of reform, perhaps even more so than O'Brien himself. Murray was less of a journalist and pamphleteer than some of the other O'Brienites, e.g. Martin Boon or W. H. Riley, usually carrying on his propaganda by the spoken rather than the written word. But in 1854 he published a pamphlet which fully confirms his reputation as an implacable opponent of political alliances between the middle and working classes. This was his Letter to Mr. George Jacob Holyoake, which deserves to become known as a classic expression of Victorian popular radicalism in its most militant form. In the course of an attack upon Holyoake for backsliding on his Chartist principles, seeking "favour with the Middle Classes" and becoming a "servile ... defender of their fraudulent and destructive system of society,"[2] Murray set down a rambling but powerful statement of the O'Brienite view of the class struggle.

Murray made it abundantly clear that even though the O'Brienites did not demand the nationalization of industry along with that of land, they believed as strongly as the socialists of the 1880s and 90s that the great landlords were not the only class opposed to the interests of the workers. The commercial middle class -- "Bankers, Brokers,

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1 Shipley, Club Life, pp. 12-16; Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, p. 147.

2 Murray, Letter to G. J. Holyoake, p. 2. A copy is available in the British Library of Political and Economic Science at the London School of Economics.

Financiers, Fundholders, Stock Jobbers, Railway Speculators and Profit-mongers" — were also "the implacable enemies of the people, in all civilized society; and must be so by their position."[1] Murray quoted from a recently-published lecture on "The Social Oppression of the Working Classes" by Dr. R. G. Gammage (the first historian of Chartism and a long-time associate of the O'Brienite cadre) to make the historical point that "as one class had monopolised the land, another class ... sought to monopolize the money; which monopoly, in the course of time, became a more powerful source of robbery than even the monopoly of the land."[2] Furthermore, argued Murray, the two kinds of monopoly were closely related. The monopoly of the soil by the landed classes benefited the middle-class "monopolists of money" as well, for it was the very existence of the land monopoly that forced millions of workers to huddle in the towns and cities and put themselves at the disposal of the moneyed class for wages just sufficient to live.[3]

In answer to the common argument (which Murray here attributes to Holyoake) that the workers should tread softly lest they alarm their middle-class sympathizers and drive them to make common cause with the aristocracy — that in matters of reform "the people and the Middle Class should be one" — Murray poured out his scorn in print as he must have done many other times in speeches and debates on behalf of the People's Charter, the National Reform League, the First International, the Manhood Suffrage League and, ultimately, the Social-Democratic

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1 Ibid., p. 5.

2 Ibid., p. 10.

3 Ibid.

Federation. "What an absurdity!" he thundered,

> The Middle and Working Classes one! There are no two divisions -- no two classes of people -- no two interests so diametrically opposed to each other as the Middle Class and the Working Class. The Aristocracy and the Middle Class are one in interest, as contradistinguished from the interest of mankind at large; they are disunited only when ... they are settling which shall have the greater share of the spoils of which they have both robbed the people ... Only let a portion of the people make a stand, headed by an honest and intelligent man, for an instalment of real reform, and then see if the Aristocracy and Middle Classes are not united, aye! even almost to a man, to prevent the people from getting one iota of justice or liberty.[1]

The reason for this united front, according to Murray, was the symbiotic relationship between the two classes which kept their interests in harmony: The landed class would not have the power to maintain its monopoly of the soil without the political support of the middle class, and the middle class could not maintain its industrial and commercial monopoly without the existence of the land monopoly -- for if the people were allowed to exercise "their inalienable right to occupy a portion of the land -- their indisputable inheritance from their Creator," then they would not be "such willing slaves" of the middle classes, "at their 'beck and call' whenever they want their labour to build themselves fortunes," only to be "cast ... aside when no longer a profit can be made of them." The relationship was so fundamental, argued Murray, that "the Aristocracy could not exist a day without a Middle Class -- and a Middle

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[1] Ibid., pp. 14-15.

Class could not possibly exist without an Aristocracy."[1]

Murray was quite willing to grant that "among the middle classes are to be found men of soul — men of heart — men of principle." But these were only "noble exceptions to the general rule," and did not change Murray's position that the most vital lesson the working-class movement had to learn was that middle-class alliances could bring it nothing but frustration and failure. He blamed "the influence, the perversity, and the never-ending intrigues of the Middle Classes" for the collapse of the Chartist movement and the failure of "all the Continental revolutions, so successfully begun, so gloriously promising," and warned that nothing had changed: "the Middle Classes ... are not with the people, because their interest is not the interest of the people."[2]

Murray's analysis of the middle-class role in the oppression of the "people" goes a long way toward explaining why the O'Brienites placed so much emphasis on credit and currency reform; that is, on nationalizing the instruments of commerce instead of the instruments of production:

> As far as the O'Brienites were concerned the middle class was, almost exclusively, the "moneylord" class — the "Bankers, Brokers, Financiers, Fundholders, Stock Jobbers, Railway Speculators and Profitmongers" whose monopoly of financial capital gave them the same kind of control over commerce and industry that the landed classes had over agriculture. It was really, then, only a section of the "middle class" as we usually think of it that the O'Brienites considered "enemies of the people." Middle-class persons who lived by some sort of productive or socially

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1 Ibid., p. 15.

2 Ibid., p. 17; emphasis Murray's.

useful work instead of by profits, dividends and interest — a physician, perhaps, or an architect, an artist or a teacher, did not necessarily come under this heading. Certainly the master craftsman with a few employees did not, nor even did the industrial employer if he worked actively with hand or brain alongside his employees, organizing and superintending their labour. On the contrary, the O'Brienites tended to regard such an employer as essentially a "productive" person, an earner, whose interests were closer to those of the workingman than those of the capitalist (in the "moneylord" sense) on whom both were dependent for the continuance of their livelihood. In other words, they viewed the conflict between the middle and working classes more in terms of "debtors vs. creditors" than of "workers vs. employers."

An 1871 article entitled "Paris To-Day — London Tomorrow" by another O'Brienite, James Harvey of Liverpool[1] (comparable in many ways with Murray's Letter to Holyoake), describes the class struggle in just these terms. Harvey's piece, like Murray's, took the form of an open letter; Harvey was attacking the Radical M.P. Samuel Morley as a false friend of the workingman in the same way Murray had attacked Holyoake. Having portrayed Morley as a natural class-enemy of workers by virtue of his "being a capitalist," Harvey pointed to "the present state of Paris" (i.e., during the struggle of the Commune) to show that there was "war to the knife" between the two classes. But he did not necessarily mean between workers and employers, for in describing the causes of the Paris conflict he spoke primarily of "money-lenders, bill-brokers, capitalists, loan societies, pawnbrokers, all screwing usurious interest

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1 Republican, 1 May 1871.

from the debtors." Concluding that the "same situation" existed in London, he stated that "The propertied class is the creditor interest, the working-class is the debtor class."

Quite in contrast with later socialist propaganda, there is no specific mention of the industrial employer; but presumably he was to be considered the class-enemy of the worker only to the extent that he was also a "capitalist" in the money-monopolist sense meant by Harvey. This evidently was the point of W. H. Riley's statement in an 1873 pamphlet entitled Strikes, their Cause and Remedy that although "no man has any more right to make a profit on the mere use of money than he has by letting land," the "active employer" was "really a working man" whose interests were "identical with those of his employees."[1]

With this outlook on the nature of the class struggle it does not seem surprising that the O'Brienites' plans for industrial reform were focused on financial capital instead of the actual "instruments of production" as we usually think of them in connection with the later socialist programmes, i.e., industrial plant and machinery. From the O'Brienite point of view there was no need to nationalize this form of capital if the sources of financial capital were in effect nationalized: If the "monopoly of money" were destroyed -- if ordinary working people, either individually or in co-operative associations, could turn to the State for capital to finance their own enterprises -- then there could no longer be any monopoly of the instruments of industrial production. Add to this the destruction of the "monopoly of the soil" which was to be accomplished by nationalizing the land, and the way would be open

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[1] Quoted in Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, pp. 270-271.

for workers to "produce on their own account" either individually or co-operatively, in agriculture or industry or both, and enjoy the full fruits of their labour.

This was essentially all the O'Brienites wanted or expected from their economic programme. They were not dogmatic on the question of individual vs. co-operative production (although their own effort to establish a co-operative community in the American West suggests where the sympathies of most of them lay). Their whole approach was basically anti-monopolist rather than positively socialist, and this is what principally distinguishes O'Brienism from the new socialism of the 1880s and after. Yet it should perhaps be emphasized again that the O'Brienites shared in full the socialist aims of setting the working-class free from "wage-slavery" and instituting a system of production for use instead of for profit.

Martin Boon and the Cry for the Land

Like most adherents of a cause or philosophy, the O'Brienites as individuals took varying paths, emphasizing different aspects of O'Brien's teachings while remaining within the general framework of O'Brienism. While Charles Murray, for instance, focused on the need for working-class political independence due to the conflicting interests of the middle and working classes, Martin Boon's primary concern was the need for land reform to counter the effects of urbanization and industrialization. Boon was convinced that urban life was debilitating and that its growing predominance was undermining the vitality and the happiness of not only the working class but the whole nation. Among the O'Brienites Boon was perhaps the leading exponent of the ideal of the sturdy farm family as the backbone of the nation.

Reflecting the widespread belief among nineteenth-century radicals that there had once been an agrarian Golden Age when all the land was held in common, "when the people generally were cultivators of the soil and when their right to own the produce of their labour was recognized," Boon maintained that until the country returned to that position "the people could not attain happiness." He charged that "false political economy" was used to justify a system of land monopoly which "drove the people into the towns where they were subjected to unhealthy influences which brought on disease and premature death" while the results of their labour "were abstracted by idlers."[1]

The first step toward reversing this trend, according to Boon, was to bring uncultivated lands and unemployed hands together: The State should take over all suitable waste land and make it available to the poor and the unemployed, either in smallholdings for individual families or larger tracts for co-operative groups, under conditions enabling them to become independent cultivators with permanent tenure. This was the policy not just of the O'Brienites but of most ex-Chartists and other advanced radicals all through the middle decades of the nineteenth century. But Boon became its leading advocate in 1869 when he published a detailed scheme for the establishment of "home colonies" which was widely discussed in the workingmen's radical clubs and helped inspire the formation of the Land and Labour League in the autumn of that year.[2]

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1 Report of address by Boon to the Croydon Political Club on "Land, Labour and Capital," International Herald, 16 March 1872.

2 Martin J. Boon, Home Colonization: Including a Plan showing how all the Unemployed might have Profitable Work, and thus prevent War, Pauperism and Crime. A copy is available at Goldsmiths' Library, University of London. For a good brief summary of the specifics of Boon's proposal, see E. E. Barry, Nationalisation in British Politics, pp. 53-4.

"We seem to be at the beginning of a long reign of terror, insecurity, and social distress," Boon wrote, referring to both the current period of commercial uncertainty and the continuing "depopulation of the rural districts by great lords" as causes of a rising tide of poverty, unemployment and emigration. "We therefore appeal for suffering humanity," he continued, after attempting to show that family farming was more productive than wage-labour on large farms,

> and ask for the land for the use of the slaving people, feeling sure that there cannot be a more delightful spectacle than to see an industrious farmer with busy wife and healthy family living in a comfortable house, rented by himself from the State, cultivating his little territory with his own hands, and enjoying the produce raised by his own labour and industry.[1]

How much better it would be both for the nation and its people, Boon cried, to encourage the increase of "so meritorious a class of the community" by throwing open the millions of acres of good land lying idle to "the men ... being thrown out of work by our present money and land laws" — how much better than merely leaving them "to be mocked by being told they have produced too much, and therefore must remain idle and in want and be satisfied to wait for better times," all the while surrounded by the "plethora of the good things of life" that had been produced by their own skill and industry.[2]

Boon abominated "the system that makes man a machine, organises labour in regiments ... and forgets the use of a spade," not only because of the injustice of dividing mankind "into only two classes ... a few

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[1] Boon, Home Colonization, pp. 6-7; p. 19.

[2] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

wealthy masters, and a huge population of unsecured wage-slaves," but because the security of the nation was at risk if its people had "nothing to fall back upon" when the "artificial conditions" of commercial prosperity failed:

> The safety of a state lies in the mass of the people having and holding the soil ... when mills stand still, and furnaces are blown out, when discounts fail at the bank, when ships lie idle on the wharfs ... When there are no wages and little trade, the cabbages, potatoes, and carrots, the cow, the pigs, and the poultry, are still there.[1]

Boon's final point regarding the dangers of "too much town and too little country" concerned the national spirit and character, above and beyond purely material considerations:

> The country is the nursery of the towns; from thence comes the energetic spirits, the genius, the ambition. It is from it our Hampdens, our Cromwells, and our Elliots come, to renew the greatness of our cities, and make London famous to the world. Sap the tree that puts forth this fruit, and what is to become of us? ... Let us have our great towns and our factories, but let us have our ploughmen and spade men too ... they are the true raw material of humanity, often a very raw material indeed, but still the right stuff, true in the grain -- the right substance to take on the polish of civilization, without losing the fibre of their native forests and the vitality of the living oak.[2]

There was, as one historian has observed, "something pathetic in this cry from a London slum."[3] Martin James Boon, long-serving member

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1 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

2 Ibid., pp. 27-29.

3 Barry, Nationalisation, p. 54.

of the IWMA General Council, officer of the Land and Labour League,[1] editor of the militant Republican newspaper (the League's organ, published from September 1870 to February 1872) and prolific pamphleteer,[2] ran an ironmonger's shop at Clerkenwell Green — one of the places where the poor of East London gathered on Sunday mornings to hear the Land and Labour League speakers tell them that "the present economical basis of society was the foundation of all the existing evils," that the land was their rightful inheritance and they must unite to reclaim it, and that if "green fields and kitchen gardens" were "incompatible with the noble sport of hunting" then they could "let the hunters emigrate."[3]

Boon's pamphlet on "home colonization" and the foundation of the Land and Labour League were in part reactions to immediate events, particularly the industrial slump and sharp rise of unemployment at the end of the sixties. This naturally called attention to conditions in the countryside by making the drift of rural immigrants into the towns a more

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1 Boon shared the post of secretary with George Eccarius, a German political exile and stalwart friend and colleague of Marx who also sat on the IWMA General Council; the joint secretaryship reflected the joint presence of Marxian and O'Brienite influence in the League, although O'Brienism seems to have been the more dominant influence.

2 Reviews of several Boon pamphlets published in the 1870s and early 80s may be found at the end of his National Paper Money (1885), which may be seen (along with Home Colonization) at Goldsmiths' Library, University of London.

3 Barry, loc. cit.; Address of the Land and Labour League to the Working Men and Women of Great Britain and Ireland (1869). This address, as well as the set of resolutions adopted at the League's foundation conference in 1869, are reprinted in C. M. Davies, Heterodox London, Vol. II (1874) pp. 216-230. The principles and programme set forth in these documents are so similar to those of the O'Brienites that it would be superfluous to summarize them here. For details of the October 1869 "Land Conference" and its background, the League's propaganda and its rivalry with J. S. Mill's more moderate Land Tenure Reform Association, see Barry's account (Nationalisation, pp. 47-56).

serious threat to the jobs and wage levels of town workers. The land question seemed to become the question of the hour for all sections of British radicalism about this time. The League, for instance, concentrated its propaganda mainly on land nationalization and home colonization, largely neglecting the other points of its wide-ranging O'Brienite-style programme. One has only to begin reading at random in any of the radical newspapers of the period to be very quickly struck by the large proportion of time and energy devoted to land reform of one kind or another by radicals who lived mostly in urban and industrial environments.

This was something more, of course, than a reaction to immediate problems caused by a temporary downswing of the economic cycle. Martin Boon's cry of nostalgia for an idealized agrarian past was one that echoed down the entire nineteenth century; it places him unmistakably within a popular tradition that stretched from Thomas Spence in the 1790s through Cobbett and Henry George to Robert Blatchford in the 1890s, transcending all sorts of differences in political and economic doctrine. Boon himself, for example, apparently had no connection with the socialist movement of the eighties,[1] but his kind of ruralism became an integral part of the new movement; it was, in fact, one of the strongest threads of continuity between the new socialism and the older radicalism.

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[1] This may have been partly because Boon — ironically for the leading advocate of "home colonization" — emigrated to South Africa in 1874 (where he settled as a merchant at Bloemfontein, Orange Free State) and was absent during the formative stages of the movement. But when he returned to London in 1884 he seems to have remained aloof from it although he continued, as he had done while away, to agitate for O'Brienite reforms: see Shipley, Club Life, pp. 8-9, and the biographical remarks by the ex-Chartist William Maccall at the end of Boon's National Paper Money.

Never was the idealization of country life and the hatred of the smoke-palled industrial city and the regimentation of the factory system more powerfully expressed than by Blatchford in his phenomenally popular Merrie England (1894), one of the most successful works of socialist propaganda ever published -- unless it was by William Morris, whose passionate "hatred of modern civilization" shaped a vision of the socialist future, perhaps most fully expressed in his 1891 Utopian novel News from Nowhere, that inspired countless socialists and other rebels against Victorian society with the dream of an ideal agrarian England that never was, but might be. The similarity of Morris's and Blatchford's ruralist ideals to each other and to those of Martin Boon also illustrates the way in which ruralism served as one of the chief points of contact between the literary-artistic tradition of romantic revolt in which Morris was bred and the popular radical tradition to which Blatchford was heir, helping to bring the two traditions closer together in the socialist movement than they had ever been previously.[I]

[I] Socialists like Morris and Blatchford and radicals like Boon and the O'Brienites all had, of course, much in common with William Cobbett in their hatred of modern capitalism, industrialism and urbanism and their enthusiasm for country life as the basis of an alternative value-system. It is interesting to note that as the kind of ruralism they represented took root and grew throughout the later nineteenth century, Cobbett's own reputation, first as a writer of rural description and then as a social critic and political thinker, was rescued from mid-Victorian obscurity and rehabilitated in a revival which continued until the 1920s and 30s (Martin J. Wiener, "The Changing Image of William Cobbett," Journal of British Studies, May 1974, pp. 135-154).

O'Brienism and the "International"

To analyze the ideas of the O'Brienites rather than to trace their interconnections with other radical groups is the primary purpose here, as stated earlier. But something more should perhaps be said about their connection with the IWMA, since except for the Land and Labour League — which was itself largely an offshoot of the IWMA — and the O'Brienites' own small propaganda societies, the "International" was the only organization with any significant influence among British workers in the 1870s which came close to a modern socialist viewpoint. This is not to say that the IWMA as a body took a declared and definitive socialist position — only that it served as a principal seedbed for socialist ideas in Britain, not only because of Marx's presence, but because it attracted socialists and near-socialists, foreign and native, of all persuasions.[1]

The basis of the IWMA's appeal to British workers was in fact largely non-theoretical. Marx was the guiding influence in defining its aims, but his strategy where Britain was concerned was one of "moderation of phrase."[2] Believing that it was useless and harmful to try to impose unfamiliar revolutionary doctrines on a worker's movement from the outside, he encouraged the IWMA to pitch its appeal largely on

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1 As Collins and Abramsky point out in support of their statement to this effect (Karl Marx, pp. 164-5), many of the O'Brienites and other former Chartists and Owenites, the British trade-union leaders and the Marxist exiles who served on the IWMA General Council were also on the League's executive; the philosophy and programmes of the two bodies were similar; and the General Council members who had been pressing for the establishment of a separate British National Council were evidently satisfied with the League as a substitute for the time being.

2 Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, pp. 287-8.

the very practical level of helping British trade unions "to augment their existing struggles, political and industrial, with the power of international combination" — a policy which was successfully implemented in a number of trade disputes and brought enough union affiliations to make the International a significant "force in the labour movement."[1]

Despite the non-theoretical nature of much of its activity, however, the IWMA did express some of the basic elements of socialist thinking -- such as the labour theory of value, the international brotherhood of workers and (in terms more clearly suggesting Marx's influence) the doctrines of "surplus value" and "immiseration" -- in its general statements of principle. One of the most interesting of these, since it was aimed specifically at a British audience and issued by the International's British Federal Council (the separate national council which was finally set up in the autumn of 1871 after Marx withdrew his earlier objections), was the address "To the Working Men and Women of the British Islands." This did not set forth concrete proposals, but announced the new council's advocacy, in line with IWMA policy, of "complete political and social equality for all members of the human race" and its representation of "the interest of labour, and of labour alone" with a view toward rebuilding society on the basis that "labour of either hand or brain should be the only condition of citizenship."

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1 Ibid. For more on Marx's opposition to the dogmatic imposition of socialist theory on working-class movements and its connection with his and Engels' disapproval of Hyndman's leadership of the SDF, see also Collins' article "The Marxism of the Social-Democratic Federation" in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History 1886-1923 (1971), esp. pp. 47-8 and p. 64.

The address calls for the international combination of "Labour and Democratic" organizations to establish the principles that "the produce of labour ought to belong to the producer" and that "the brotherhood of labour should be the basis of society." Continuing with an attack upon the "so-called Politico-Economic Doctrine of Competition," it briefly explains the "surplus value" doctrine and predicts that the growth of mass-production capitalist industry would inevitably mean increasing poverty and misery for workers.[1]

There is nothing in this document that the O'Brienites would not have accepted wholeheartedly (as is confirmed by its prominent display in W. H. Riley's International Herald); yet its tone and emphasis reveal subtly but unmistakably, despite the somewhat vague wording and the lack of specific proposals, that this was not really an O'Brienite piece of propaganda. The conspicuous absence of the typical O'Brienite references to the "land and money laws" and credit and currency reform; the way the emphasis falls upon large-scale industry and the condition of the industrial proletariat instead of on the land and the small farmer or craftsman; the tone of statements such as the assertion that by capitalism "an industrial serfdom has been engendered far more fatal in its effects than that which existed under feudalism"[2] -- all these features seem to suggest the guiding hand of Marx, as does the overall impression of a desire to attack capitalist industrialism directly instead of seeking an escape from it in a mass return to the land and small-scale production.

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1 International Herald, 16 March 1872.

2 Ibid.

This does not mean, however, that the influence of O'Brienites on the IWMA was small. Few if any of its British members could be accurately described as Marxists despite the evidence of Marxian influence in documents like the address just discussed, but O'Brienism was well represented among them. Some of the O'Brienites' connections with the "International" have already been mentioned, such as the affiliations of their National Reform League and Charles Murray's West End Boot Closers and the prominent role of O'Brienites on the General Council. At least five O'Brienites served on the Council for periods of three to five years between 1868 and the removal of the Council to New York in August 1872 -- Boon, Murray, George Milner, George E. Harris and William Townshend.[1] Others served for shorter periods, including Richard D. Butler, a compositor and delegate to the London Trades Council who, like Murray and Townshend, was one of the group of O'Brienites who worked with the Social-Democratic Federation in the eighties.[2]

From Marx's point of view the O'Brienites were by no means ideal allies. They were "full of follies and crotchets, such as currency quackery, false emancipation of women, and the like,"[3] and several of them -- Butler, Boon and Harris -- became involved in the damaging anti-centralist revolt against the powers of the General Council which came

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1 Documents of the First International, Moscow (n.d.), Vol. II, p. 193, pp. 231-244; Vol.III, p. 106, p. 226; Vol. V, pp. 152-3, p. 167, cited in Shipley, Club Life, p. 6.

2 Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, pp. 249-50; Hyndman, Record of an Adventurous Life, p. 254; Shipley, Club Life, pp. 53-4.

3 Marx to Friedrich Bolte, 23 November 1871, quoted in Collins and Abramsky, loc. cit.

to a head in 1872.[1] Nevertheless, Marx found that

> these O'Brienites, in spite of their follies, constitute an often necessary counterweight to trade unionists in the Council. They are more revolutionary, firmer on the land question, and not susceptible to bourgeois bribery in one form or another.[2]

William Townshend's reminiscences about Marx in a conversation with Max Beer, recorded by Beer in his book Fifty Years of International Socialism, confirm Marx's own assessment of the role played by the O'Brienites on the General Council and also suggest that their relations with him were for the most part friendly and that they held him in high esteem. Townshend told Beer that although Marx "knew more of social and labour questions than all of us" he was always "very courteous" in council discussions. "I am an old O'Brienite," Townshend continued:

> The land question and currency reform were our proposals for putting an end to exploitation. Marx agreed with us ... as to the importance of land nationalization, but he rather made fun of currency reform. He called us, good humoredly, currency quacks, and he declared quite frankly that he thought us valuable members of the Council in order to counterbalance the Capitalist-Liberal influence of some of the Trade Union members ... He always behaved like a gentleman; it was different with Engels, who started attending our meetings after 1870. He was a domineering German, but he had the funds, and we often needed his financial help. I wish Bronterre O'Brien had lived a few years longer; he would have been the man to argue currency matters out with Marx; none of us could.[3]

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[1] Collins and Abramsky, loc. cit.

[2] Marx to Bolte, 23 November 1871, quoted ibid.

[3] M. Beer, Fifty Years of International Socialism (1935), pp. 133-4. Beer had met Townshend in 1895 under rather sad circumstances. The scholarly shoemaker, now aged and in poverty, was selling off the library of historical, philosophical and political works he had spent a lifetime acquiring; Beer, walking through Soho, had been attracted by the display of radical books and old Chartist pamphlets laid out in Townshend's living-room window.

It seems to have been only after the Paris Commune that some of the O'Brienites, with other erstwhile English allies of Marx such as John Hales, the long-time secretary of the General Council, began to take part in the revolt against the Council's authority which had been growing in several of the IWMA's foreign sections for some time. These English radicals were no doubt influenced partly by the Commune-inspired enthusiasm for "decentralization and federalism" which helped to swing much of the international Left toward anti-centralism and outright anarchism in the post-Commune period.[1] But Townshend's reference to the "domineering" attitude of Engels reminds us also that a traditionally strong ultra-democratic hostility toward centralized authority already existed among English radical workingmen, O'Brienite or otherwise, without regard to any new Continental influence. Engels may well have aggravated this traditional suspicion of "centralizing and despotic power,"[2] which certainly had much to do with the rapid breakup of the IWMA in Britain after 1872. It must also be counted as one of the principal reasons why the Marxian brand of centralist socialism, calling for the nationalization and state management of industry as well as the land, failed to make much headway in Britain until the idea of a socialist state under democratic control — the "social-democratic" idea of combining centralist socialism with full political democracy — had been firmly established by the new movement of the eighties.

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1 Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, p. 249.

2 Quoted Ibid. The phrase was used by Richard Butler in justifying the formation of a new "Universal Federalist Council" in 1872 by seceding members of the British Federal Council.

The effects of the anti-centralist spirit that dominated advanced radicalism in the seventies may be seen both in the nature of the local IWMA branches formed around Britain in 1871-72 and in the failure of Marxian ideas -- particularly a proposal for nationalizing "the branches of industry" -- to win approval at the IWMA's British national congress at Nottingham in 1872. The British Federal Council was officially formed in October, 1871, and by the time of the Nottingham Congress late in the following July it had established some twenty-five branches distributed around London (where there were five), the major provincial centres, Scotland and Ireland.[1] These branches in effect gave the IWMA a new political wing in Britain in addition to the existing affiliates of the General Council, mostly trade unions. The new branches, according to Henry Collins, took the form of "socialist propaganda bodies," but "inevitably the ideas propagated -- the only socialist ideas in the field -- were those of Bronterre O'Brien."[2]

O'Brienism was still the closest thing to modern socialism which was familiar enough to British radicals and congenial enough to their anti-centralist proclivities to win much acceptance among them. Events at the Nottingham Congress seemed to confirm this and indicate that it would remain so for the time being. Nevertheless, the subjects of discussion at the Congress, if not its final programme decisions, seem to suggest that both Marxian and O'Brienite thinking were represented there, perhaps more strongly than in any similar gathering of British radicals before the 1880s.

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[1] Henry Collins, "The English Branches of the First International," in Asa Briggs and John Saville, eds., Essays in Labour History (1960), pp. 249-252; p. 259.

[2] Ibid., p. 259.

John Hales, writing in the International Herald shortly before the Congress, accurately foreshadowed the major themes of its discussions, in which he was to play a major part. Taking an organic view of society in opposition to the prevailing individualism, Hales urged "that the interest of the individual must be merged in the interest of the community, and that it is the duty of each not only to let others live, but to help them do so." He advocated the "reconstruction of society" on the principle of "Communism ... the opposite of Competition," stating that the latter simply meant "the rule of the Strong at the expense of the Weak." In a separate piece in the same issue, Hales exhorted workers everywhere to push for independent representation by men of their own class, citing the recent formation of a committee for this purpose in Hackney, East London, as an example of how they should proceed.[1]

At the opening session of the Congress the delegates heard a report on correspondence received by the British Federal Council which indicated a high degree of militant class-consciousness in the local branches. This summary of the general tenor of a "mass" of correspondence suggests the widespread presence of a viewpoint similar to that of Hales, although without the positive emphasis on "Communism" and organic social theory which seemed to reflect his long association with Marx:

> The writers are thoroughly dissatisfied with their present political and social condition, and express themselves in unmeasured terms against the system that thus degrades them ... Some state as their opinion that things cannot continue much longer, before some sort of eruption

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1 International Herald, 22 June 1872.

> takes place ... giving, as a reason, the two extreme positions in which the producer and the non-producer is [sic] situated, the latter absorbing everything into their own hands ... The thoughtful workingman begins to see the fallacy of the so-called politico-economic doctrine of supply and demand, which is advocated by the partisans of a class that benefit thereby.[1]

The indication that these were the typical views of rank-and-file members of the International around Britain must have pleased both O'Brienites and Marxists in the leadership. There was nothing in these views that belonged exclusively to either school of thought, but there was much that either of them could consider compatible with its teachings and a good basis to build upon.

The same observation would also apply to the highlight of the first day's proceedings, the consideration of a proposal introduced by Edward Jones, secretary of the Congress, that

> the time had arrived when they should have a separate and distinct political party in this country, apart from any existing party and based on the claims of labour — based on the preamble of the International — that the emancipation of the working classes must be carried out by the working classes themselves.[2]

After other delegates had spoken in support of Jones's resolution to this effect (including Dr. G. B. Clark, later a leading member of the Democratic Federation in its earliest years, and W. H. Riley, the O'Brienite editor of the International Herald), John Hales rose to say that while he "thoroughly endorsed the principle" of Jones's resolution,

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1 Report of the proceedings of the Nottingham Congress, International Herald, 27 July 1872.

2 Ibid.

he wished to move an additional resolution which would make it "more comprehensive." Hales's phraseology, however, seemed also to make the proposal sound a little less militant:

> while we recognize the fact that the social emancipation of the working classes is the great end to which all our efforts should be directed, we also recognize the fact that it is necessary to take political action to work out that social emancipation, and we hereby pledge ourselves to establish a distinct labour party based upon the principles of the International.[1]

It has been suggested that by placing his emphasis on immediate political action Hales was attempting to push the long-term social aims of the proposed party into the background.[2] Yet the strong emphasis on social goals in Hales's International Herald article quoted above (which also included, for instance, the statement that "the fullest political liberty can avail nothing so long as the greatest part of the human race is steeped in ignorance, want and destitution"), as well as his apparent support for the idea of nationalizing other "instruments of production" besides the land (see below), makes it seem doubtful that it was really his intention to water down the "labour party" proposal. Considering that Jones's actual resolution (as distinct from the statement, quoted above, that he made in introducing it) was reported as stating simply that "the time has arrived for the formation of a third party in this country based upon the claims of labour," possibly Hales meant only

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1 Ibid.

2 Collins, "English Branches of the First International," p. 263; Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, pp. 256-7; p. 265.

3 International Herald, 27 July 1872.

what he said -- that he wished to make the proposal "more comprehensive." In any case, the delegates themselves did not seem to notice any discrepancy between the two resolutions and enthusiastically approved both of them, as well as others calling upon the trade unions to join the new party.[1]

The second day's proceedings were dominated by debate over the proposed platform for the new "labour party." This included one plank that definitely seems to reflect Marxian influence, a demand for "the nationalization of the land, and all the instruments of production." Hales, who had been on the platform committee which drew up the proposal, moved for its adoption (seconded by Jones), but at this point "the discussion grew very lively." One London delegate (duPont, a Continental exile), proposed a definite "plan for nationalizing the branches of industry," but even Hales felt that this went "too far for the present condition of knowledge among the English people." Many of the other delegates opposed the whole idea of any nationalization beyond that of the land, saying that they "believed in local authority" and this would mean too much centralization. After considerable and somewhat heated debate the nationalization plank was amended to demand only "the nationalization of the land." There was only one other economic demand -- a clearly O'Brienite-influenced proposal for the nationalization of banking and the issue of currency -- in the platform as finally approved by the Congress; it did not otherwise go beyond the usual radical proposals of the time, e.g., adult suffrage and proportional representation, abolition

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[1] Ibid.; Collins, loc. cit.

of all hereditary titles and privileges, church disestablishment and free education.[1]

If the idea of forming a new political party could have been successfully carried out, as Henry Collins has observed, "the International would have sponsored a party which, with its trade union affiliations, would have anticipated politically and structurally the Labour Representation Committee" of 1900, "with the O'Brienite National Reform League providing inspiration for its political wing"[2] much as the later socialist organizations did for the modern Labour Party and its forerunners. But nothing was to come of the "Labour Party" proposal of 1872, both because the trade union movement was not yet ready for it and political and economic conditions generally were unfavourable, and because the International itself soon began to disintegrate owing to internal divisions and the lack of effective leadership after Marx had engineered the removal of the General Council to New York and retired from active participation.

Had the British section of the International managed to survive into the middle and later 1870s, it probably would have become not the nucleus of a broad-based party of the general working-class movement but, as Collins and Abramsky have suggested, "a small political party conducting propaganda for Socialism of the O'Brienite school."[3] As indicated above, it already seemed to be moving in this direction during the

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1 International Herald, 27 July 1872; Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, p. 258.

2 Collins, loc. cit.

3 Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, p. 276.

period between the formation of the British Federal Council and the convening of the Nottingham Congress, the first separate congress of British IWMA branches. Further confirmation that O'Brienism was emerging as the dominant political philosophy among British Internationalists (or at least among those who were active radicals as distinct from the purely trade-unionist members) may be seen in the character of William Harrison Riley's International Herald, which appeared as the organ of the British Section (at first unofficially, but soon officially) on 2 March 1872.

It is not clear if Riley had ever been personally associated with Bronterre O'Brien, but his views were typically O'Brienite with the characteristic advocacy of labour political independence and producers' co-operation together with economic demands calculated to break up the "monopoly of land and money," and his newspaper followed the O'Brienite line perhaps even more consistently than Martin Boon's Republican, its immediate predecessor (which folded the month before the Herald appeared). Riley's background, however, indicates that he was not one of the long-established Soho circle of O'Brien's personal followers, most of whom apparently were Londoners who spent most of their lives in the metropolis. Riley was a Northerner, the son of a Manchester local preacher, and seems never to have stayed in one place or occupation for very long. He learned engraving as a young man and spent three years working in America; then, back in England, he worked as a commercial traveler for a cloth-printing firm with which his father was connected and during this period became interested in socialist ideas. In America again from 1866 to 1870, he worked in the jewellery trade and as a journalist and met Walt Whitman. He then came to London, where he

published a collection of his Yankee Letters to British Workmen and joined the IWMA.[1]

Riley soon came under the influence of Marx and Engels, and before launching the International Herald he wrote to them asking them to contribute to the paper and promising full coverage of IWMA activities.[2] The Herald was not intended to be the organ of the International exclusively. The statement of the paper's objects in the first issue covers all the usual contemporary radical demands, e.g., "reduction of the hours of labour," "universal suffrage" and "the abolition of class or hereditary rule," along with typical O'Brienite proposals such as "the nationalization of land and currency" and "the liquidation of the National Debt."[3] In another early number the "friends" of the Herald are listed as "the active members of the International, of the Republican Clubs, the Land and Labour League, the Secular societies, Radical Associations, etc."[4] and the activities of many such groups were regularly reported. But beginning with its sixth number on 11 May 1872 (when it also began publishing weekly instead of fortnightly) the Herald announced itself as the "Official Organ of the British Section of the International Working Men's Association."

A reading of the International Herald — particularly some of Riley's articles in the early numbers - on the origins, aims and

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1 W. H. G. Armytage, "Ruskin as Utopist," Notes and Queries, May 1956, pp. 219-224. Riley is dealt with here because of a brief association with Ruskin in the late seventies; see below, p. 76.

2 Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, pp. 242-3.

3 "Our Salute," International Herald, 2 March 1872.

4 International Herald, 30 March 1872.

principles of the IWMA — is a revealing study in the adaptability of O'Brienite ideas. Distinctively O'Brienite doctrines seem to be harmoniously (and apparently unconsciously) blended with the Marxian-inspired principles of the International and with the precepts of the Communist Manifesto, illustrating one of the chief ways in which O'Brienism helped prepare the ground for the new British socialism of the 1880s.

One good example of this blending of Marxian and O'Brienite ideas may be seen in the way Riley integrated the O'Brienite currency doctrine (which Marx did not accept) with the labour theory of value and the "surplus value" concept, according to which workers were robbed of all the wealth they produced beyond the pittance necessary to keep them alive and functioning. Starting with the principle that "all wealth is made available for use by means of labour and labour only," Riley concluded that only a currency which expressed values in terms of labour could serve as a medium of equitable exchange:

> Labour only can pay for labour ... Gold as money is a relic of barbarism ... its use for that purpose is merely continued for the object of increasing and perpetuating the wealth of idlers and speculators, and of keeping the industrialists on the verge of poverty ... and forcing them to give three-fourths of their labour for the privilege of retaining one-fourth of the results.[1]

To Marx the O'Brienites' insistence on currency reform was only one of their "follies and crotchets," but to Riley it seemed to be a logical and essential step toward the great goal set forth in the credo of the International (which Riley quotes in full in the article just cited):

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[1] "The International Society: its Origins and Aims," International Herald, 2 March 1872.

"the emancipation of the working classes" by their own united effort from "the economical subjection of the man of labour to the monopoliser of the means of labour."[1]

In another article Riley traces the antecedents of the IWMA back to the foundation of the Arbeiterbildungsverein (Workers' Educational Society) in London in 1840 by German exiles whose "chief aim was the propagation of Communistic theories"[2] and the issuing of the Communist Manifesto of 1848, which he interprets in distinctly O'Brienite terms. After approvingly quoting a paragraph from the Manifesto which urges international proletarian unity in the "struggle between the wage labourers and the capitalists" and calls for the "overthrow of the rule of the capitalists by the acquisition of political power," Riley sums up the "practical measures" of reform implied in the Manifesto as the "abolition of private property in land," the nationalization of banking and credit and the "means of transport," the establishment of "national workshops" and the "reclamation and improvement of land on a common plan," and free education for all children.[3] These proposals obviously add up to much the same sort of economic programme that O'Brien and his followers had advocated since the Chartist era. The O'Brienite nature of Riley's interpretation of the Manifesto is also evident in his

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1 Ibid. This statement, which also describes the economic emancipation of workers as "the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means," was printed on the back of every member's card in English, French and German. It is interesting to note that everything in it seems to agree as well with O'Brienism as with Marxism.

2 International Herald, 16 March 1872. Riley notes that the Chartist leader Ernest Jones had been "one of the few English members."

3 Ibid.

characteristic attack on capitalists, not as industrial employers monopolizing the means of production but as financiers monopolizing money and credit -- "bankers, discounters, Jew millionaires, and all the other huge gamblers and speculators" -- and in the way he places "the honest and industrious merchants and manufacturers" in the same category with wage workers as "industrialists."[1]

Riley was, however, as much opposed to competition as any Marxist, and just as firmly convinced that "combination" was the key to the reformation of society. The following passage from an attack on the doctrine of "individual enterprise" in another of his International Herald articles might have been taken from any typical socialist lecture of the 1880s and 90s:

> Individual enterprise indeed! Why not leave the delivery of letters, the protection of the nation, the government of the people, or the regulation of a city to individual enterprise: Our railroads and mills are not worked by individuals, but by combined enterprise. The people in towns and cities could not exist without combination, and the progress of the future will be the result of combination. The more combination the better, and if the whole world combined, war and injurious competition would cease.[2]

The chief difference between Riley's view of combination and that of the later socialists lay in who was to combine against whom. For Riley -- who accepted the broad O'Brienite definition of a "working man" as an "earner," any person whether employer or employed "who makes himself useful to the community, or is self-supporting" -- it was not

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1 Ibid.

2 International Herald, 27 July 1872.

a combination of workers against employers that was wanted, but one of "industrialists" against "idle monopolists," that is, earners against non-earners.[1] In an article entitled "Who are the Victims?" Riley elaborated further on this point in explaining his views on the nature of the class struggle: There were only "two distinct economic classes, the earners and the non-earners," and it was only between these categories that there was a true conflict of class interests. There was not necessarily any conflict between employers and employed, or between workers and the "middle classes" so far as their economic interests were concerned. Riley envisioned the combination of all "earners" in abolishing competition and instituting a system of co-operative production and exchange; he regarded disputes between workers and employers as examples of fellow "earners" misguidedly warring against each other instead of against their mutual enemy, the "non-earners" who lived without labour on the wealth produced by "honest industrialists of every grade."[2]

In believing that at least some middle-class people — depending on their attitudes and the extent to which their economic interests placed them in the "earner" category — could become allies in the struggle against the "idle monopolists," Riley seems to have taken a more moderate view on the question of class conflict than some of the O'Brienites, especially Charles Murray. Riley certainly did not wholly rule out, as Murray seemed to do, the possibility of political co-operation with the middle class on an ad hoc basis being sometimes advantageous to workers. However, Riley's stern warning to members of the middle class that they

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1 Ibid.

2 International Herald, 21 September 1872.

must either join the coming revolution in which "the Industrialists of Europe and America" would "demand and seize the reins of government," or be treated as enemies, suggests that there was no deep division between his outlook and Murray's. "You must be with us or against us" was Riley's message to the middle class:

> If you unite with us you may help us to act prudently and wisely. If you refuse to join us in our efforts to obtain justice, you must blame yourselves if you are treated as enemies. Let every man who is willing that he and his descendants shall earn their living, without danger or fear of overwork or poverty, unite with us ... Let the "middle class" victims of misrule take care that they, by their own passive or active opposition, do not also become the victims of reform.[1]

By early 1873, some of the confident revolutionary enthusiasm that had characterized the International Herald seems to have gone out of it. Largely this reflected the unhappy state of the IWMA, now divided and without effective leadership both in Britain and internationally. In Britain the local branches were left to stagnate while the leaders, split into two rival national councils since shortly after the Hague Congress of the previous August (when the General Council had been removed to New York to forestall the threat of a takeover by Continental anarchist forces), spent their time in factional squabbles.[2]

Riley, who waited until January 1873 to air the factional dispute in the columns of the Herald, sided with the "official" British Federal Council and attacked John Hales, leader of the secessionist "Universal

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1 Ibid.

2 Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, pp. 270-273.

Federalist Council" which repudiated the authority of the Hague Congress and the General Council, as the central figure in the troubles.[1] Riley now dropped the subtitle identifying the Herald as the official organ of the IWMA, but continued to report the British Federal Council's activities until it apparently ceased to meet regularly in the early autumn of 1873. Apparently most of the Soho O'Brienites also supported the "official" council, for it held its meetings through the spring and summer at their own headquarters, the Eclectic Hall in Denmark Street.

As the International faded, the International Herald seemed to devote more of its space to republicanism and the republican clubs which were still mushrooming around the country and less to ambitious social and economic proposals. Apparently reflecting radical discouragement about the prospects for a general social revolution in the near future, Riley turned his attention more toward the perennially attractive Owenite idea of bypassing political struggle in favour of small-scale experiments with co-operative communities.[2] In August 1873, finding it financially impossible to carry on his paper in its existing form very much longer, Riley announced plans to discontinue it and start a "new series" under a new title, The Social Republican.[3] In the event, however, the new paper, a small monthly which appeared shortly after the International Herald's last number was published on 18 October 1873, was called The Republican Herald.

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1 International Herald, 4 January 1873.

2 See, e.g., "Our Commune," International Herald, 18 January 1873.

3 International Herald, 30 August 1873.

Riley continued publishing the new paper, first under this title and then as The Herald and Helpmate, until April 1875, when he and his wife left London for Bristol and took on the management of a co-operative store. By mid-1877 Riley was in Sheffield, publishing a short-lived monthly called The Socialist (July-December 1877), in which he proclaimed himself a Christian Socialist. About this time he attracted the attention of John Ruskin and was entrusted with the management of St. George's Farm at Totley, near Sheffield, an experimental craft-cum-farming co-operative community of Sheffield shoemakers sponsored by Ruskin. Riley's apparently cantankerous and overbearing ways soon landed him in trouble, however. His supervision of the Totley enterprise was high-handed and dictatorial in the extreme, alienating both the communitarians and Ruskin. By 1879 Riley had emigrated to America with his wife and child, this time apparently to stay permanently.[1]

It has been said with good reason that "the socialist revival of the 1880s was stronger because the International had existed in England and because many of those participating in the revival knew that they were continuing in its tradition."[2] The First International was effectively dead by 1874, and in fact the whole wave of labour and radical excitement that characterized the early seventies was rapidly receding. But the O'Brienites and other ultra-radicals of similar views

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[1] Armytage, loc. cit. A letter from Riley to the SDF organ Justice, sent from Massachusetts in 1884, indicates that by this time he had given up completely the idea of reforming society through government and had become an anarchist-communist: see Chapter VI below, pp. 197-8.

[2] Collins and Abramsky, Karl Marx, p. 303.

who had been associated with the International continued their activities on a smaller scale throughout the seventies, providing a bridge of continuity which kept its ideals alive, together with those of the Chartist tradition, until the early eighties brought a new radical ferment and the beginnings of a new socialist propaganda. By then, in conjunction with a new wave of revolutionary exiles who fled Bismarck's repression in the late seventies, they were introducing a younger generation of British radicals (like Frank Kitz, mentioned earlier, or Joseph Lane, Jack Williams and James Macdonald, all of whom will be dealt with later in connection with the beginnings of the SDF) to the teachings of Marx and Lassalle as well as Owen and Bronterre O'Brien. Functioning as an extremist leaven in the milieu of the workingmen's republican and radical clubs, they continued, as W. H. Riley had done in the International Herald, to clothe revolutionary doctrines imported from Europe in the familiar language and world-view of British radical democracy, thus helping to start and to shape a new British tradition of democratic socialism.[1]

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[1] One of the most important of these agitators in the late 1870s was John Sketchley of Birmingham, who began his career as a Chartist in 1839 and died a stalwart of the SDF in 1900. A major contributor to Riley's International Herald, Sketchley founded an apparently semi-socialist body called the "Midland Social-Democratic Association" in Birmingham in 1878 and in the early 1880s became the first secretary of the SDF branch there. He is best known, however, for his 1879 pamphlet The Principles of Social Democracy: an Exposition and a Vindication, in which he integrated a basically O'Brienite outlook with the strongly Lassallean-influenced 1875 "Gotha Programme" of the German Social-Democratic Party. For further details of Sketchley's career and views see E. P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (1955) p. 322, and Barry, Nationalisation, pp. 132-4.

CHAPTER III

UNCERTAINTY AND REVOLT: SOCIALISM AND THE MOOD OF THE EIGHTIES

Early in 1881 a young Edinburgh tailor named James Macdonald -- like so many British workingmen at this time a "great admirer of Mr. Gladstone" -- came to live and work in London.[1] Macdonald, who considered himself a radical but so far had taken no active part in politics, would soon become one of London's first socialist workingmen.[2] He was to be a stalwart of the Social Democratic Federation, and, by the middle nineties, secretary of the London Trades Council and a prominent member of the Independent Labour Party. How did James Macdonald make the transition from Gladstone supporter to socialist agitator?

Soon after his move to London, Macdonald joined a Scottish club which met at a public house in Tottenham Street, Marylebone. As it happened, this pub was also the meeting place of a group of "old guard" radicals -- former Chartists, including some of the O'Brienites, and others who had belonged to the old Land and Labour League or the IWMA -- and exiled Continental socialists. One evening the landlord told the Scottish group that these "red-hot Fenians and dynamiters" were meeting in another room. Out of curiosity Macdonald and a few others went in to listen and eventually were introduced. Among those they met were James and Charles Murray; Frank Kitz, the London-born son of a German exile, who had been instrumental in starting the "English Section" of

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1 J. Macdonald, "How I Became a Socialist," Justice, 11 July 1896.

2 Ibid.

the Rose Street Club; and C. J. Garcia, an active propagandist for Marxism in London radical clubs and "advanced" journals.[1]

After listening to a round of vehement denunciations of the new Liberal Government's impending Irish Coercion measures, Macdonald and one or two others "took up the cudgels" for Gladstone and his party. They attended further meetings of the radical group as "a sort of opposition," until "gradually we found that we were losing ground, and then we threw in our lot with the others, and formed the Central Marylebone Democratic Association."[2] By this time — apparently well into the spring of 1881 — the Democratic Federation was being organized. But Macdonald found it unimpressive at first, as the Marylebone group's program was "more advanced than the program of the Federation was then."[3]

In this period of newly intensified radical activity, Engels' series of unsigned articles in the Labour Standard contained perhaps the earliest definite appeal in an English journal for the "abolition of the wage system altogether" by means of a new working-class party based on the trade unions.[4] These articles, published in May, June,

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1 Ibid. For the Continental refugees and their London clubs see E. P. Thompson, William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary (1955), pp. 317-321, and below, p. 80; p. 199. For the Murray brothers, see above pp. 42-47. Garcia regularly contributed articles written from a Marxist viewpoint to George Standring's Republican after October 1882. In its issue of this month the paper also noted his availability as a lecturer and his recent appointment as London correspondent for the German SozialdemoKrat.

2 Macdonald, loc. cit.

3 Ibid.

4 Some excerpts are printed in Karl Marx and Frederich Engels on Britain (Moscow, 1953), pp. 474-481.

and July, 1881, were brought to Macdonald's attention by Adam Weiler,[1] whom he met "with other German socialists" at this time. Macdonald credits the Engels articles and H. M. Hyndman's England for All (June 1881), which contained a summary of Marxian doctrine, with strongly influencing him toward socialism. About the middle of 1881 Macdonald joined "the German Club in Tottenham Street."[2] This was the Rose Street club's Tottenham Street offshoot, formed in 1880 by Marxist exiles distressed at the increasing domination of the Rose Street group by the bombastic and foolhardy anarchist Johann Most.[3]

Macdonald did not join the Democratic Federation immediately, but was attracted to it as soon as he could see that it was about to become an avowedly socialist body. He was elected to its executive at the annual conference in mid-1883,[4] apparently not long after joining. He soon became fast friends with the irrepressible Jack Williams, and for some years they were "two inseparables" in agitation.

Macdonald's account of his transition to socialism from a mainstream "advanced Liberal" viewpoint shows some of the typical ways in which radical workingmen became acquainted with socialist ideas in the

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1 Weiler, a German joiner long resident in England, had been a member of the IWMA and supporter of Marx, as well as a follower of Bronterre O'Brien. As a delegate of the Cabinet Makers' Alliance, Weiler was in the forefront of the campaign in the TUC during the 1880s for a definite commitment to land nationalization.

2 Macdonald, loc. cit.

3 E. P. Thompson, William Morris, pp. 319-321, and Chapter VI below, p. 199.

4 Macdonald, loc. cit. He says 1882, but this is clearly a mistake as the context refers to events of the 1883 conference.

early 1880s. A slightly different pattern of influence appears in the recollections of H. W. Lee,[1] a mainstay of the SDF as its full-time secretary from 1885 onward. Like Macdonald, however, Lee was set adrift from his early attachment to Gladstone and the Liberals mainly by his dismay at the party's handling of the Irish Question.

From reading Reynolds's Newspaper aloud to his uncle when he was a boy of nine or ten in the mid-1870s, Lee had "imbibed a certain amount of Radicalism," but he remained "content with the Liberal Party until the Coercion Act of 1881 turned me bitterly against Gladstone, and I drifted into Republicanism."[2] Lee became disillusioned in turn with republicanism as a solution to social problems after he was convinced (ironically, by the arguments of a royalist) that the French masses were no better off than the British.

Unlike Macdonald, Lee had no personal contact with socialist exiles or with the circle of "advanced" men in the London radical clubs. But during 1883 -- Lee was then only 18 -- socialist literature in English was becoming more widely available, mainly through the efforts of the Democratic Federation. Like thousands of others who came of age in the 1880s and 90s, Lee was actively searching for a new philosophy of social betterment. When this literature came into his hands he was soon convinced he had found what he was looking for.

As Lee tells it, his first contact with socialism came at a Trafalgar Square demonstration in August, 1883 for Charles Bradlaugh, then battling for admission to Parliament without taking the oath:

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1 H. W. Lee, "How I Became a Socialist," Justice, 16 March 1895.

2 Ibid.

"Some members of the Democratic Federation were selling copies of 'Socialism Made Plain' at the meeting. I bought one, and that 'made plain' unto me how I had been floundering in my Radical and Republican opinions."[1] Lee then read all the socialist pamphlets he could find -- still not many at this time -- until A Summary of the Principles of Socialism, by H. M. Hyndman and William Morris, appeared and confirmed him in his growing belief "that in socialism alone could I hope to find political salvation."[2] Still knowing no members personally, Lee applied to the Federation by letter and received his member's card in January 1884.

In the accounts drawn upon here neither Macdonald nor Lee mentions Henry George or the burgeoning land-reform movement as a factor in his personal "conversion," although one of Macdonald's first public lectures in 1881 was on the inadequacy of Alfred Russell Wallace's newly-publicized plan for nationalizing the land.[3] However, few if any who became socialists in the 1880s did so without being touched in some way by the "Land Question" or the influence of George.

This influence may be seen quite clearly in another rank-and-file SDF member's personal account of his introduction to socialism: H. W. Hobart, a factory worker of Wesleyan background, an early (and life-long) advocate of temperance, took little notice of politics in the early eighties. But about 1885 his interest in social problems, and ultimately in socialism, was aroused by a debate with his brother-

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1 Ibid.

2 Ibid.

3 Macdonald, loc. cit.

in-law over Henry George's Progress and Poverty. Hobart had recently read the book as did thousands of other working people in these years, but on finding his brother-in-law engrossed in it he told him he considered George's land-reform proposals "impracticable." This led to a discussion that went on for hours, in which the brother-in-law drew upon the arguments of a socialist fellow-worker as well as those of George.[1]

Hobart came away from this debate feeling that he'd had the worst of it -- and the matter stayed in his mind. Hobart also had a socialist workmate -- Henry Wagstaff, then of the Bethnal Green SDF branch -- and he began listening seriously to Wagstaff's views. When the famous Trafalgar Square demonstration of 8 February 1886 took place, Hobart was present. He found himself strongly in agreement with the socialist speakers' demand for an immediate programme of public works for the relief of the unemployed, whose numbers at this time had reached their highest levels of the severe economic downturn in the mid-eighties.[2]

Hobart still was not fully convinced, but a few months later he was finally won over to socialism for good. He joined the SDF after attending a Sunday lecture by Herbert Burrows (a leading member of the

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1 H. W. Hobart, "How I Became a Socialist," Justice, 17 November 1894.

2 Ibid.; Henry Pelling, Origins of the Labour Party (2d ed., 1965), p. 42. The wealthier classes were already apprehensive about the angry mood of the unemployed, and the militant behaviour of the crowd on this occasion created a very real, if misguided, fear of violent revolution. This is clearly revealed in the reports and commentary in the Times for several days following the demonstration. On unemployment in this period see M. J. Cullen, "The 1887 Survey of the London Working Class," International Review of Social History, Vol. XX (1975), part I, pp. 48-60, an account of a little-known Government survey of 30,000 working men in four metropolitan districts.

Federation since its foundation) in which "all the objections I had prided myself upon as being insurmountable were carefully analysed, discussed and finally exploded." The following Sunday at Clerkenwell Green, Hobart made his own debut as a socialist lecturer, soon becoming one of the most active in the Federation's ranks of workaday propagandists.[1]

Many more of these personal accounts of socialist "conversions" could be cited, but these three should be enough to suggest how some of the main currents of the times -- ideological, political and economic -- were converging in the early eighties in a way that encouraged the spread of socialist ideas. Five closely related factors seem to have been especially important in this process: (1) the widespread belief that Britain had entered a period of economic decline and the resulting loss of confidence in the existing economic system; (2) the increasing general tendency to question entrenched ideas, especially the laissez-faire philosophy and its basis in classical political economy; (3) the new crisis in Ireland and its repercussions in British politics; (4) the revival of the land reform movement as a rallying-ground for advocates of social change; and (5) the wave of radical disillusionment with the Liberal Party caused by the Gladstone Government's Irish policy and its neglect of popular reform demands.

All these tendencies are so interdependent in their origins and effects that it is very difficult to separate them for discussion and analysis. We cannot draw sharp lines between economic factors, the Irish crisis, the land question, the new mood of disillusionment and revolt or any number or related influences -- for instance, the presence

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1 Hobart, loc. cit.

of European socialist exiles, disenchantment with America and with narrowly political radicalism, or the efforts of clever and determined individuals -- in assessing their contribution to the development of socialism. They are too closely intertwined for that. However, we may hope to gain a better understanding of how these influences combined and reinforced each other to produce an extraordinary ferment of discussion and agitation through which older currents of romantic revolt, intellectual social criticism and popular artisan radicalism found new expression in the rise of modern socialism.

The Economy and the New Mood of Revolt

Britain's changing economic situation and the growing mood of unrest and revolt against the mid-Victorian orthodoxies were closely intertwined. To say this is not to place any undue emphasis upon economic factors; there is still no generally accepted theory relating economic change to social movements and it is not intended to suggest one here. Nor is it necessary here to debate the question whether the traditional concept of a "Great Depression" occurring in the years 1873-1896 is really valid.[1]

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[1] For comprehensive summaries of the "Great Depression" debate, with extensive bibliographies, see S. B. Saul, The Myth of the Great Depression, 1873-1896 (1969) and Peter d'A. Jones, The Christian Socialist Revival, 1877-1914 (Princeton, N.J. 1968), pp. 31-40. Saul concludes (p. 54) that "the major outcome of modern research has been to destroy once and for all the idea of the existence --- in any unified sense" of a "Great Depression" during the 1873-1896 period, but indicates that some of its supposedly characteristic features, such as falling prices and profits, a declining rate of industrial growth and a sharp drop in agricultural employment, did exist as long-term trends.

Evidently there was no real "depression" in the technical sense, but what is more important in the present context is that contemporaries were nevertheless concerned and alarmed about economic developments, and that from about the end of the 1870s economic discontent seems to have significantly reinforced movements for social change by helping to create a public mood more receptive to unorthodox ideas.

By this time it was becoming increasingly clear to contemporary observers that the long period of booming national prosperity won by Britain's industrial head start was coming to a close. Other countries, particularly Germany and the U.S.A., were rapidly industrializing and strongly challenging Britain's domination of world trade. The rapid expansion and soaring profits of the mid-Victorian decades gave way to a period of falling prices and profits, a declining rate of industrial growth and rising unemployment, punctuated by bouts of unusually bad trade and severe unemployment in 1879, 1884-7 and 1892-5.[1]

The state of the countryside seemed to be a particularly serious cause for concern. Agriculture was in sharp decline or even extreme distress if one takes at face value the public outcry which went up at the end of the 1870s and continued until the early twentieth century. The annual reports of the Land Nationalisation Society in the early eighties were not untypical -- despite the Society's special interest in land reform -- in their strongly expressed conviction that British agriculture was in serious trouble and that this was one of the principal factors in the general social and economic malaise. In his president's address to the Society's 1884 annual meeting, for instance, A. R. Wallace described the census returns of the previous year

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[1] Saul, Myth of the Great Depression, pp. 9-10; pp. 25-31.

as an "alarming" indication that a rapid decline of agriculture was taking place, marked by "the rural districts ... almost universally becoming depopulated, the towns becoming overcrowded, and land going out of cultivation," and that this "lay at the root of all the evils of poverty and overcrowding in our towns."[1] By 1885, the view of the LNS that a "disastrous overcrowding of towns and depopulation of rural districts" had occurred and that "unrestricted land monopoly" was largely responsible for the social evils of both town and country[2] had become common currency among all sections of British radicalism, as is indicated by the emphasis on the land in much of Joseph Chamberlain's famous "unauthorized" Radical Programme for the 1885 general election.[3]

There was at least some basis for the widespread concern over agricultural decline. The numbers employed in agriculture did fall sharply (although this was partly because of the pull of competing urban occupations) and some sectors, especially grain production, suffered seriously from falling prices. During the late seventies British and Irish farm production suffered from several successive bad seasons. Meanwhile, European markets were inundated by an unprecedented flood of cheap American wheat made possible by improved technology: mechaniza-

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1 Report of the Land Nationalisation Society, 1883-4, pp. 11-13.

2 Ibid., 1884-5, p. 13.

3 D A. Hamer, Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery (Oxford, 1972), pp. 102-4.

tion on the farms and speedier, cheaper transport over land and sea.[1]

These developments caused a sharp drop in agricultural profits, with serious social and political repercussions that acted as an important stimulus to the nascent socialist movement.[2] Historical revision, however, has revealed no general agricultural depression. Wheat growers did indeed suffer (and their losses of course pushed down total agricultural profits), but small farmers meanwhile raised livestock quite profitably on cheap imported grain. Mainly it was structural change, involving a decline in arable farming and a shift to livestock that produced rural distress and dislocation and continuing public concern about agriculture. These were long-term trends which had begun as early as the 1850s and were not peculiar to the supposed "Great Depression" period.[3] What really was happening was that "during the 1880s and 1890s Britain finally revoked her agrarian past; agriculture was firmly established as nothing more than the handmaiden of industry."[4] Given the age-old significance, both practical and emotional, of the land and rural life, such a trend was not easily recognized or accepted, especially by

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1 Saul, Myth of the Great Depression, pp. 34-5; E. P. Lawrence, Henry George in the British Isles (Michigan State University Press, 1957), pp. 14-15; J. L. Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish Nation (1938), pp. 154-155. For contemporary socialist comment see H. M. Hyndman, "The Revolution of Today," To-Day, N. S. Vol. I (January 1884), p. 4, p. 10; and Karl Marx, letter to N. F. Danielson, 12 September 1880, in Marx and Engels on Britain, pp. 510-511.

2 Especially the swift rise of agrarian crisis in Ireland in 1879-80, the resulting turmoil in English politics and the new surge of popular interest in land reform. The influence of these factors will be discussed in the next chapter.

3 Jones, Christian Socialist Revival, p. 55; Saul, loc. cit.

4 Jones, loc. cit.

radicals and many early socialists.[1]

There was evidently no real "depression" in this period, and this should caution us against giving much weight to actual economic decline as a factor in the spread of socialist ideas. Nevertheless there was a period, coinciding with the rise of the new socialism, of falling prices, sharp new foreign competition, and a slowing down of growth. Although the real income of fully employed workers was rising, partly because of falling commodity prices, unemployment and erratic employment were on the increase in this period for many artisans and especially for casual workers.[2] Since a general revival of popular radicalism and the first stirrings of the new socialist movement followed so soon afterward, the particularly serious bout of unemployment in 1879 may have been a significant cause of discontent, even though many trade union leaders first reacted to it with caution rather than militance.[3] A similar pattern of a sudden rise in unemployment followed by an upsurge in working-class discontent and popular radical activity occurred a decade earlier: In the seventies (with the added

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1 The emotional importance of the land and the idealization of rural life that marked both the romantic and popular radical traditions have been mentioned in Chapters I and II above. For some early socialist converts, the land question always remained foremost. And it will be remembered that in the mid-nineties Robert Blatchford was still in revolt (as was William Morris) against industrialization itself -- not only capitalism -- and the dream of a ruralized "Merrie England" could still inspire an impressive popular following.

2 The growth of the casual labour syndrome in London, the crisis in jobs and housing of the early and middle eighties and public reaction to the social threat posed by the "residuum" are thoroughly treated in Gareth Stedman Jones, Outcast London (Oxford, 1971).

3 Saville, "The Background to the Revival of Socialism in the 1880s," Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 11 (Autumn 1965), p. 17.

inspiration of the Paris Commune) some of the most extreme radicals seemed to be moving toward a vaguely socialist position — a kind of "social republicanism." External circumstances were perhaps even more dramatic at the start of the 1880s, however, when we consider the political excitement over the Irish agrarian crisis in addition to noting (as John Saville has pointed out) that "1879 was the worst year for the records of trade-union unemployment between 1870 and 1914, and there is no doubt about the new sense of unease that is widespread among all sections of society."[1]

It seems reasonable to suggest, as one student of the matter has done, that "high and erratic unemployment under conditions of general economic expansion and rising living standards" was a type of economic situation especially likely to aggravate social discontent and thus enhance the appeal of socialism: "Poverty in the midst of progress, particularly the general progress of one's own social class, is likely to hurt deeply."[2] In these circumstances the phenomenon of "felt" poverty becomes especially significant. The feeling of being poor becomes perhaps more important than the actual degree and extent of suffering. As E. J. Hobsbawm has explained it, the poor "were beginning to be less ready to forgo the amenities and satisfactions which they saw others enjoying. Whatever happened to actual poverty, 'felt poverty,' as J. A. Hobson called it, increased rapidly at this time."[3]

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1 Ibid.

2 Jones, Christian Socialist Revival, p. 33.

3 Labour's Turning Point, p. xvii.

It is factors like the "new sense of unease" among the public at large and the growth of "felt" poverty that seem most relevant to the present inquiry. In explaining the development of ideas, what people thought was happening may often be more significant that what was really happening. Whatever the actual facts of the matter as may be determined by economic historians, the general public during the period in question were convinced that they had come upon hard times and the possibility of imminent social upheaval. If there was no "depression" in the strict sense of the term, there was by the end of the 1870s enough apparent decline from the relative strength of the mid-Victorian economic position to unsettle the confidence of both working people and the wealthier classes. "The impact of a frustrating occurrence," Helen Lynd has observed in this connection,

> must be measured in terms of the strength of confidence and expectation which it affects. It is against this faith and expectation, shared from the fifties to the seventies by all groups in England, that the role of the depression in speeding the demise of economic liberalism must be seen. Certainly the period of falling prices, falling profits, increased foreign competition, contracting opportunities for investment, was increasingly FELT between 1873 and 1896 as ' the great depression'.[1]

Both because of their own economic worries, and their concern over the extent to which working-class discontent might grow, "the serene confidence of the British middle-class was temporarily shaken, and all sorts of movements of change ... made considerable headway."[2] This situation continued from about 1880 (although leftward pressure within the trade-

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[1] Helen M. Lynd, England in the Eighteen-Eighties (Oxford, 1945), pp. 113-14.

[2] Hobsbawm, Labour's Turning Point, p. xix.

union movement became effective only in the later eighties) until confidence returned on a wave of imperialist enthusiasm in the later nineties and something of a reaction set in against Labour and other "advanced" causes.

The new public mood, as reflected in the popular radical viewpoint, is well expressed in a mid-1881 editorial from one of the most politically "advanced" newspapers, the weekly Radical. By comparison with the current atmosphere, it claimed, the mood of a few years earlier had been one of mere "frivolity." But now "the condition of the country question" had become a matter of universal concern: "Nowhere can any human being be found who is so blind to facts, or so sanguine in temperament, as to express contentment with things as they are ... Everywhere there is a feeling that something must be done."[1] Two years later the Christian Socialist, in its first issue, similarly but even more strongly voiced the general feeling in "advanced" circles that thoroughgoing reforms were necessary to head off social crisis. In the growth of "the conviction that wrongdoing and injustice are at the root of our social anarchy," its editors saw new hope for eliminating "the misery and despair" still "paralyzing millions" in a setting of general prosperity. It warned that "social reform or social disruption must shortly take place."[2]

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1 The Radical, 11 June 1881. This paper, as it spoke for the section of popular radicalism most closely connected with the beginnings of organized socialism, will be given close attention later.

2 Christian Socialist, June 1883. Started as the organ of the "Land Reform Union," a new coalition of land reformers, socialists, and "Christian" socialists, and consciously patterned after its namesake of the early 1850s, this monthly soon began to carry detailed reports of Democratic Federation activities as its editors (J. L. Joynes, R. P. B. Frost and H. H. Champion) moved toward a definitely socialist viewpoint. For more on the early Christian Socialist and the Federation, see Chapter VIII below, pp. 308-9; pp. 311-12; pp. 318-20.

Reflecting a more conservative position at about the same time (1883), the editors of the Quarterly Review -- fearful rather than hopeful about threats to the existing order -- cited the presence of mass disaffection and the possibility of revolution as universally acknowledged facts.[1] "Apathy unfortunately no longer exists," they warned. They believed that revolutionary sentiment, in the form of socialism and the land nationalization movement, had grown to such proportions that its "supposed" scientific basis ought to be publicly discredited by rational argument.[2] Their estimate of the extent to which socialism had infected the masses is so overblown, especially for this early date, as to be amusing. But it effectively reveals the exaggerated fear of revolution among the "comfortable classes" at this time.

A somewhat less defensive tone -- that of a worried but enlightened moderate counseling limited social reforms to counteract revolutionary ideas -- was also common in the intellectual periodicals of the early eighties. A good example is H. M. Hyndman's article "The Dawn of a Revolutionary Epoch."[3] Published in January, 1881, just before he became involved in the negotiations that led to the founding of the Democratic Federation, it reflects his views at the time of his first acquaintance

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1 "Socialism in England," Quarterly Review, Vol. 156 (1883), pp. 353-356.

2 Ibid, pp. 357-359. The article proceeds with a detailed refutation of the case for public ownership of land and the Marxian doctrine of "surplus value" as presented in Hyndman's England For All (1881) and the Democratic Federation manifesto Socialism Made Plain (1883).

3 Nineteenth Century, Vol. IX, pp. 1-18.

with socialism.[1] "Never, perhaps," wrote Hyndman, "has the certainty of approaching trouble, social and political, been more manifest than it is today." He pointed to the rise of revolutionary feeling around Europe and the progress of socialist doctrines there, noting especially the "really formidable" position of the German Social Democrats, who had captured 600,000 votes at the last general election.

Acknowledging the relative quiescence and the lack of "dangerous excitement" among English workers, Hyndman ascribed this largely to their enjoyment of greater political and civil liberties than their Continental counterparts. But he warned that militance would soon arise under conditions of continued poverty and misery confronted by vast wealth. Besides the penetration of Continental revolutionary theories, "economical causes" were "working a silent revolution" in popular thinking about the English landed property system. In this connection he stressed the example of the Irish reaction to agrarian crisis and "parliamentary lynch law." To deal with the Irish question and the "growing democratic influence" in general, Hyndman called for a limited extension of the "state-management principle" and the overriding of "some of the cherished principles of ordinary political economy." He counseled the wealthier classes to recognize "both their dangers and their duties" and be "ready to lead," not for their own advantage but for the benefit of

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1 Hyndman later referred apologetically to the article's "regrettable timidity" in failing to "speak out plainly for socialism" (The Record of an Adventurous Life, p. 225), but its tone is not surprising when we remember that when he wrote it he was still strongly influenced (as he always would be to some extent) by his earlier "Tory Democrat" orientation. Hyndman was a great admirer of Beaconsfield; having just read Capital, he sought out the old statesman about this time in an abortive attempt to get his support for a reorientation of conservative policy to take account of Marx's ideas (Record, p. 248).

the class below which was "really the nation."

One notable similarity between Hyndman's view and that of the Quarterly Review is that both placed rather more emphasis on revolutionary ideas than on strictly economic factors as agencies capable of stirring up mass disaffection. According to the Quarterly, the danger of the current social unrest lay not in its actual intensity but in the appeal it lent to these ideas. The real threat to the established order was "not the presence of any exceptional suffering, but the growth of a speculative conviction." If the current revolutionary temper was "less ferocious" than in Chartist times, this was only a sign of its greater "confidence."[1]

Several years later, after the great unemployed demonstrations of the middle eighties and the role the socialists played in them had sharply aggravated middle-class fears, the Westminster Review similarly analyzed the sources of unrest. It censured "official optimists" and their statistical studies for a serious "miscalculation of the factors and forces in modern society." Granting that there was probably "not more poverty or misery in England than there used to be," it argued that this wasn't the point: the significant fact being that there was "infinitely less disposition on the part of the poor to put up with their poverty." This was a worldwide trend, and the socialists were so successfully exploiting it in Britain that their agitation was not to be "sneered at or suppressed."[2]

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[1] Quarterly Review 156: 356.

[2] Westminster Review, December 1887, quoted in Max Beer, A History of British Socialism, Vol. II (1920), p. 265.

As all this suggests, the question whether economic factors or new ideas were foremost in creating the restless social climate of the 1880s is rather like the question of the chicken and the egg: the relationship is obvious enough, but it is hard to say which came first. It seems certain, however, that "bad trade," rising unemployment and the general worry over economic conditions helped to undermine middle-class confidence and aggravate working-class discontent, thus lending credibility to the predictions of imminent social upheaval that were being made by both proponents and opponents of revolution.

This pattern emerges quite plainly in Gareth Stedman Jones' close study of London,[1] where the national economic troubles were intensified by several local factors: There was the relative lack of mass-production factory industry because high rents and distance from fuel sources made it uneconomic; there was the decline and disappearance of important traditional industries like ship-building and silk-weaving; there was a chronic, increasingly critical shortage of working-class housing in the central area.[2] These circumstances, aggravated periodically by bad trade and hard winters, had made the inner industrial perimeter "an area of chronic male under-employment, female sweated labour, and low-paid, irregular artisan work in declining trades; an area associated with small dealing, petty criminality and social desolation."[3]

The festering condition of the area's tightly-packed slums burst dramatically into public consciousness in 1883, largely owing to the

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1 The London situation seems especially noteworthy here, as it was in the metropolis that the new socialism established its first foothold.

2 G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, pp. 152-155; p. 281.

3 Ibid., p. 154.

extensive publicity given "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London," an outspoken pamphlet by a Congregationalist minister.[1] Shocked especially by its revelations of the moral effects of overcrowding, journals, newspapers, and members of Parliament, as well as church and charity groups, took up the "Bitter Cry" and demanded State action. Where there had been relatively little interest before, the housing crisis became a cause celebre which was the prelude to a "more sweeping and universal" sense of social crisis that afflicted middle-class London after the sharp trade decline of 1884-7 set in.[2]

Another matter of growing public concern in London during the early and middle eighties was that not only the casual poor but many "respectable" artisans -- traditionally the most politically-conscious workers -- were afflicted with unemployment and overcrowded, unsanitary housing at high rents. These conditions were upsetting not only in themselves but because "the dangerous possibility existed that the respectable working class ... might throw in its lot with the casual poor"[3] -- as socialist agitators, much in the public eye from about 1883, were of course always urging it to do.

Stedman Jones concludes that fears of the "respectable" workers and the "residuum" joining in a general working-class revolt, combined with worries about Britain's declining industrial position and the exodus from the countryside, "played a significant part in provoking the

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1 A reprint of this pamphlet (together with several others written in reaction to it), with an introduction by Anthony S. Wohl, was published by Leicester University Press, 1970.

2 Stedman Jones, Outcast London, p. 230; p. 281.

3 Ibid., p. 285.

intellectual assault which began to be mounted against laissez-faire both from the right and the left in the 1880s."[1] This observation touches upon what was perhaps the most widely pervasive ideological trend of the period: a trend which strongly encouraged the rise of socialism, and was in turn encouraged by it. This of course was the attack on laissez-faire, which implied not only a revolt against economic Liberalism but a challenge to the prevailing values of the age — a challenge through which the romantic rejection of industrialism, the popular radical tradition and the new socialist vision could meet on common ground.

The Rejection of Laissez-Faire

The orthodox political economy had begun to be questioned in academic and professional circles some years before the new currents of unrest made it a subject of widespread popular debate. "From the point of view of a sympathetic hindsight," the economic historian

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[1] Ibid., pp. 296-297. Stedman Jones says "both from the right and the left" to emphasize that this tendency had its conservative, authoritarian side — the aspect which led towards "social imperialism" — as well as its better known radical side. He argues (pp. 311-314) that historians have misinterpreted the revolt against economic individualism by concentrating on apparent precursors of the Welfare State like proposals for old-age pensions, national insurance, subsidized housing, free school meals, etc. and neglecting the punitive attitude revealed by the sort of proposal often coupled with these -- e.g., to segregate the casual poor in detention centres for 'loafers', to separate pauper children from 'degenerate' parents, to ship the residuum to overseas colonies, or to set up home labour colonies that sounded like prison camps. He finds behind such proposals the social-Darwinist idea of "an indissoluble connection between Imperial efficiency and social reform," which was emerging in the 1880s and became quite influential in the later nineties. The Fabians actively promoted it in the nineties, most successfully after the Boer War began (pp. 330-333). Other English socialists, notably Hyndman and Blatchford, also had "social imperialist" tendencies. For a detailed study of the development of this attitude see Bernard Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform (1960).

T. W. Hutchison has observed, "the 1870s appear today as one of the three or four outstanding decades of creative debate in the history of English political economy." These years had seen "the melting away of comfortable mid-century certainties and the reopening of issues long proclaimed as finally settled."[1] Thus by the early eighties the late-Victorian revolt against laissez-faire was already well underway, working in conjunction with the new sense of economic uncertainty and the prevalence of "felt" poverty to create a more hospitable climate for the advocates of radical political and social change.

The growing academic debate about the methods and doctrines of political economy, and particularly about the responsibility of Governments to intervene on behalf of those whom circumstances had left powerless in the economic struggle, was part of a much wider movement of thought. There was a markedly stronger public interest in social problems and a new confidence that they could be solved through scientific study. Urbanization, industrialization, more efficient transport and communications, the new political importance of the urban working-class — all these factors had helped to create

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1 Hutchison, Review of Economic Doctrines, 1870-1929 (Oxford, 1953), pp. 5-6. For the economists' revolt against the old political economy, see also Helen Lynd, England in the 1880s, Chapter III, esp. pp. 98-104 on J. S. Mill's growing doubts, and the discussion of reactions to the supposed "Great Depression" in Chapter IV; and Beer, History of British Socialism, Vol. II, pp. 231-8.

> not, of course, poverty, but the social problem of poverty, 'the social question,' and had brought on the dawning of a much more sensitive social conscience, and of a much wider social self-consciousness ... An irrevocable step was being taken in the transition from the 'closed,' unselfconscious, spontaneously functioning society of tradition and inheritance, into the 'open,' selfconscious society of choice, plan, and design.[1]

Besides the more concrete factors mentioned, this transition was also being furthered by pervasive influences of a cultural nature. There was the decline of traditional Christian faith and of preoccupation with religious questions; the concurrently rising faith in the power of the scientific method to solve human problems; the transference of the desire to serve God into the desire to serve man. This growing humanist and scientific orientation — exemplified by the later Mill, Matthew Arnold, the Comtists, the Henry George crusade, Charles Booth's pioneering studies -- also encouraged public interest in economic theory and social investigation, and the belief that "social knowledge must mean social power."[2]

The socialist and social philosopher, Belfort Bax,[3] recalling these cultural and intellectual trends in his reminiscences, felt that by the early eighties they had created a whole new climate of ideas.

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1 Hutchisen, loc. cit.

2 Ibid., pp. 8-9.

3 For an account of Bax's intellectual development and an exposition of his personal brand of Marxist philosophy, see Stanley Pierson, "Ernest Belfort Bax, 1854-1926: The Encounter of Marxism and Late Victorian Culture," Journal of British Studies, Vol. XII, No. 1 (November 1972), pp. 39-60.

Bax also believed that the rise of a "new generation" characterized by declining religiosity and a greater concern with moral and social issues was a major factor in the rise of socialism, for the "collapse of a living and active faith in the supernatural" encouraged the "substitution of a human and social ideal, and of human and social sanctions, for the old theological ones."[1]

Bax himself was a prime example of this process, but his own youthful revolt against narrow Nonconformist religiosity and his continued militant hostility towards religion perhaps led him to overemphasize the role of socialism as a kind of humanist substitute religion. It was not necessary to reject conventional religion — certainly not so vehemently as Bax did -- in order to consider oneself a socialist.[2] Nevertheless, revolt against Christian orthodoxy, even amongst those who came to the socialist vision from a strongly religious orientation,[3] was a common feature of late-Victorian socialism, especially in London. As such it must be recognized as a significant factor -- though only one amongst many — in the movement's origins.

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1 E. B. Bax, Reminiscences and Reflexions of a Mid and Late Victorian (1918), p. 58; pp. 71-2; p. 93.

2 P. d'A. Jones observes (Christian Socialist Revival, pp. 79-80) that "the revival of the Christian social conscience was part of the general socialist and reform revival ... it shared similar political and intellectual roots and was stimulated by the same crises and circumstances."

3 Annie Besant's progress from Christian orthodoxy to secularism to socialism is a good case in point: see A. N. Nethercot, The First Five Lives of Annie Besant (1961). One thinks also of the "Christian Socialist" movement and of men like John Trevor, founder of the Labour Church: see Trevor's autobiography, My Quest For God (1894) and K. S. Inglis, Churches and The Working Classes in Victorian England (1963).

In religious attitudes as with economic and social trends, developments in the metropolis where socialism first took root are of special interest in a study of the movement's beginnings. In London revolt against orthodox religion and the substitution of a humanist creed was a strong tradition. By the early eighties the organized secularist or "free-thought" movement was reaching the peak of its size and influence; and after a generation of relative political quiescence, it was becoming closely entwined with popular radicalism. Since Tom Paine's day militant secularism had been the typical creed of the radical London artisan. Now, with the "epic struggle" of Charles Bradlaugh to take his duly won seat in Parliament as an atheist, secularism became "once more a radical political issue." The workingmen's radical clubs enthusiastically rallied to Bradlaugh's banner, also supporting the secularists on other issues, while the latter in turn became active campaigners for radical demands.[1]

This drawing together of secularism and radicalism, meanwhile, coincided with a drawing-away of "advanced" working-class radicals (although not yet any significant section of the trade-union movement) from the official Liberal Party with its middle-class and Nonconformist bias. The growth of this "religious class friction" between popular radicalism and Liberalism[2], added to other kinds of friction which will be examined later, could only strengthen the disaffection that set some

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1 Paul Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour: the Struggle for London 1885-1914 (1967), pp. 31-2. Thompson's close study of London grass-roots politics nicely complements the work of Stedman Jones in the social and economic field.

2 Ibid., pp. 91-2.

of these radicals to thinking about a "new party." At the same time, a number of prominent middle-class secularists, such as Herbert Burrows, Edward Aveling and Annie Besant, were becoming attracted to the new socialism that was now appearing on the radical scene. They would work actively for a time in both the socialist and secularist causes,[1] just as others would work for both socialism and Christianity, or socialism and land nationalization.

What has been said so far about the changing economic circumstances and public attitudes of the incubation period of late-Victorian socialism may be summed up as follows: By the early 1880s, a kind of crisis of confidence seems to have arisen. There was a growing conviction that the existing social system was unjust and that the orthodox theories of economy and society were wrong. A general consensus was emerging among thoughtful people of all classes that a "social problem" existed, that it was becoming acute, and that something ought to be done about it. In this climate of uncertainty about social and economic questions, the long-standing romantic and intellectual critique of industrial capitalism, of the conditions and assumptions so closely identified with middle-class Liberalism, seemed to assume new importance and prominence. Attitudes whose existence was essential to the appeal of the new socialist vision were rapidly gaining currency: the feeling of disgust with the established order as a whole, the conviction that the rivalry of the great parties was a sham and a delusion, the belief that Liberalism in particular was a bankrupt and hypocritical philosophy.

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[1] Ibid., p. 33.

One noteworthy example is a July, 1880 article entitled "The Future of Liberalism" in which, as the Liberal Party enjoyed one of its greatest hours of triumph, Matthew Arnold foreshadowed the coming attack upon Liberal politics and the Liberal world-view.[1] The piece might better have been called "The Failure of Liberalism," for this is really Arnold's theme: The Liberal Party, because of its conformity to the narrow outlook of middle-class "Philistines," had ignored all the great human needs or "means of civilisation" except one, "the instinct in the community for expansion," and hence had done little or nothing for the equally important needs of "intellect and knowledge and beauty and a humane life."[2] As Arnold saw it, Liberalism had failed to deal with these needs because it had failed to grasp the idea of equality: as long as the present "immense inequality of conditions and property" lasted, the community as a whole was inevitably degraded. As matters stood, concluded Arnold in a phrase that succinctly sums up the new mood of social discontent, "we have an upper class materialized, a middle class vulgarized, a lower class brutalized. And this we owe to our inequality."[3]

The disillusionment with Liberalism reflected in Arnold's attitude was complemented by a similar disillusionment with the political system of America. Radicals now began to find a great deal wanting in the American system which for generations they had held up as a model for political change in Britain. Professor Pelling, as the result

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1 Nineteenth Century, Vol. VIII, pp. 1-18.

2 Ibid., pp. 13-16.

3 Ibid., p. 17.

of a special study of this development, concluded that

> while moderate Liberals and old-fashioned Radicals were still savouring the advantages of the American political structure ... those who were concerned especially about economic inequality and distress made the discovery, for the first time, that America was in a similar case with Britain in this respect. Unemployment and poverty on the one hand, and the growth of monopoly on the other, were now prominent features of the American scene: and these features stimulated the conversion of British Radicals to a Socialist or Socialistic standpoint.[1]

With the growth of economic uncertainty, the spread of views like those just discussed among radicals and the middle-class intelligentsia, the new prominence of various kinds of individual and social revolt and the widespread sense (hopeful or fearful) of great social change in the offing, a new cultural climate was being created. In this climate the forces of popular radicalism -- which had never fully accepted the orthodox views of society and the economy -- were able to thrive and expand to an unusual degree. They had also the benefit of wider publicity owing to the greater readiness of press and public to take radical reformers seriously and consider their ideas worth discussing, either to praise or condemn them. The resulting ferment of radical activity and discussion helped incalculably in bringing together the handful of middle-class rebels and working-class radicals who were moving toward socialism. Once they had formed a tiny but vigorous movement -- this having occurred by about 1883 -- the continuing atmosphere of uncertainty, unrest and revolt would help them to gain public notoriety, to

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[1] Henry Pelling, America and the British Left (1956), pp. 64-5.

make further "converts," and finally, by the later eighties, to begin having an influence upon the wider working-class movement.

It is time now to turn from general trends to the more specific issues that affected the course of popular radicalism. Among the catalysts of the new radical ferment from which the socialist movement emerged, the Irish revolt and the land question were outstandingly important.

CHAPTER IV

IRELAND, THE LAND QUESTION AND THE NEW RADICAL FERMENT, 1879-1882

Nothing had been more remarkable, observed H. M. Hyndman at the beginning of 1884, than "the rapid effect of the Irish agitation" on the recent growth of English radicalism and socialism.[1] It was in the late 1870s that the stage was set for the new Irish rebellion that had such far-reaching effects on politics and social movements in England. Ireland had enjoyed three or four uncommonly prosperous and peaceful years in the middle 1870s. Farmers did so well that evictions were fewer than at any other time in the century, and agrarian crime almost ceased. But agricultural prices began to drop in 1877 as the new flood of cheap American grain began pouring into Europe. Ireland was hit at the same time by a series of bad seasons, made worse by a sudden drying-up of credit and heavy pressure on farmers to repay existing debts.[2]

Falling prices and bad seasons affected the British Isles in general, as noted earlier; but Ireland's greater dependance on agriculture meant that "given the maintenance of free trade after 1873, falling prices had a much more powerful impact upon the Irish peasantry" than upon other United Kingdom agriculturists.[3] Agrarian misery rapidly returned as tenants fell into arrears and evictions rose steadily from less than 500 in 1877 to well over 2,000 in 1880. Gladstone's Land Act

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1 Hyndman, "The Revolution of To-Day," To-Day, N. S. Vol. I (January 1884), p. 7.

2 J. L. Hammond, Gladstone and the Irish Nation (1938), pp. 154-5.

3 Saville, "Revival of Socialism," p. 17.

of 1870 proved "a feeble anchor in the storm," as its clauses designed to prevent wholesale evictions in crises of this kind had been rendered toothless by the House of Lords.[1] As the crisis developed, the emerging leadership of Charles Parnell and Michael Davitt made it the basis of a new revolt against British landlordism and a powerful political drive for Home Rule. During Parnell's dramatic rise to power in Parliament, Davitt took the lead in organizing a strong new out-of-doors movement both in Ireland itself and among the Irish in America.

During his seven-year imprisonment for Fenian activities Davitt had nurtured not an indiscriminate hatred of the English, but a conviction that the root of Ireland's troubles was the English system and not the ill-will of the English people. By his release in 1877 he had adopted as a basic principle — one which brought him great respect among English radicals and socialists — the belief that there was an identity of interest between the common people of Britain and Ireland; that they could and must work together for their common benefit.[2]

On behalf of the fledgling Irish Land League, Parnell and Davitt made an American speaking tour in 1879, to which Irish-Americans reacted with enthusiasm and liberal donations.[3] In October of the same year the Land League was formally inaugurated at Dublin; by now, as J. L. Hammond has observed, "Davitt had succeeded in bringing together the most formidable force that Ireland had yet collected, by combining social

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1 Hammond, loc. cit.

2 Ibid., p. 152; Justice, 19 January 1884; E. Eldon Barry, Nationalisation in British Politics, (1965), p. 59.

3 E. P. Lawrence, Henry George in The British Isles, (E. Lansing, Michigan, 1957), p. 8.

discontent with political ardour."[1] The simmering Irish revolt reached boiling point soon after the new Gladstone Government took office in 1880. The Lords' rejection of a "Compensation for Disturbance" bill to relieve evicted tenants, combined with rising demands for coercion, helped bring matters to a head by the close of the Parliamentary session in September. The Land League's membership swelled to hundreds of thousands; its income -- mostly from America -- and its activity grew in proportion. Its new weapon, the boycott, proved highly effective against rent rises and evictions. Agrarian crime increased too, despite Davitt's denunciations. Landlords were so terrified that the rush of evictions in 1880 slowed nearly to a standstill in the last quarter of the year. The moratorium the Government had sought to legislate was enforced instead by Irish intimidation and violence.[2]

The angry mood of Parliament, and of Gladstone's Whig cabinet colleagues, made it apparently impossible to get significant land reforms unless the cry for coercion were satisfied first.[3] Through the coercion-cum-reform approach Gladstone secured the Irish Land Act of 1881, no mean achievement under the circumstances. Limited though it was, it set a significant precedent for legislative restraint upon the claims of private property and "freedom of contract." But the measures of repression that preceded it destroyed Irish trust in the Government's good will, further provoking both Irish rebellion and English retaliation to the detriment of further reform efforts.[4] More significantly in regard to the rise of

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1 Hammond, Gladstone, pp. 153-4.

2 Ibid., p. 192.

3 Ibid., pp. 205-209.

4 Ibid., p. 244; pp. 252-3; pp. 325-6.

socialism, these measures also provoked intense dismay among the more extreme English radicals, leading to their political estrangement from Gladstone and a deepening disillusionment with Liberalism. More will be said of this later, but even before the issue of Liberal Coercion arose, Ireland's troubles were having another kind of impact on English radicalism.[1]

The Reopening of the Land Question

Land reform had come to the forefront of radical politics in the early seventies, and the most militant section of working-class radicals had campaigned energetically for land nationalization and "Home Colonisation." But with the disappearance of the IWMA and the Land and Labour League, the general labour and radical retreat in the mid-seventies and the shift of interest from domestic to foreign issues, the land question largely fell into abeyance for the time being. The early stages in the buildup of the Irish crisis went largely unnoticed also. Radicals were preoccupied by the battle of political giants, first over the question of British intervention in the Balkan conflict and then in the campaign for the general election of 1880.[2]

The Land League's sudden burst into prominence in that year ensured that British radicals would now give Ireland their full attention. Their new awareness of the extent of Irish agrarian misery would bring

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1 For a recent account of the Irish developments summarized here and their effects upon the various sections of British Radicalism, see T. W. Heyck, The Dimensions of British Radicalism: The Case of Ireland, 1874-95 (Urbana, Illinois, 1974), Chapters Two and Three.

2 Barry, Nationalisation, pp. 56-7.

the whole question of land reform sharply back into focus and rekindle the old nationalization movement.[1] Just as the drama of the Irish "Land War" was beginning in 1879, radicals were becoming aware of the apparent agricultural depression threatening the whole of the British Isles. Charles Bradlaugh, although he no longer advocated nationalization as he had done a decade earlier, was inspired late in this year to start a new organization for more moderate land reforms.[2] The foundation conference of his "Land Law Reform League," held in February 1880, stopped far short of endorsing nationalization, but the demand for it was raised. The secretary of the Manhood Suffrage League, which contained the remnant of Bronterre O'Brien's old following, moved for its adoption in words O'Brien had used in 1849. He was supported by the London Trades Council delegate, who said his members wanted nationalization and would support any reforms leading toward it, but were against free trade in land.[3]

Despite an impressive launching and a nationwide membership roll of 400,000 by November 1880, the Land Law Reform League had little impact and quickly faded away. Apparently it lacked unity of purpose, and

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1 The "last flicker" of the campaign begun by the Land and Labour League in 1869 "went out unnoticed" in April 1878 when a series of meetings held on Clerkenwall Green in an effort to revive the League's agitation failed to arouse interest. (Barry, Nationalisation, p. 57).

2 Ibid., p. 55; p. 57. Bradlaugh had joined the Land and Labour League in 1869.

3 Ibid., p. 57. The principal demands of the programme endorsed by the conference, which Bradlaugh had drafted, were free trade in land, compensation for tenants' improvements, abolition of the Game Laws, a graduated Land Tax and compulsory cultivation of arable land being held idle. The formation of the Land Law Reform League was reported in Bradlaugh's National Reformer and George Standring's Republican.

Bradlaugh was unable to give it the central direction it needed because of his election to Parliament and his strenuous campaign to keep his seat without taking the oath.[1]

On the other side of the Atlantic in 1879, the American land reformer Henry George had published Progress and Poverty, which, besides setting forth his scheme for nationalizing land in effect by means of a "Single Tax" appropriating the whole value of ground rents, offered a stirring moral indictment of existing social conditions. George and his book, later to arouse intense popular interest, remained virtually unknown in Britain until 1881, when the book was published here and George himself arrived. But George had long been aware of the developing Irish agrarian crisis and was anxious to apply his theories to it.[2]

George met Davitt during the latter's American tour in 1879 on behalf of the Land League; Davitt apparently was favourably impressed by George's view of land reform as the key to social betterment in both Britain and Ireland and by his criticism of Parnell's objective of peasant proprietorship. George regarded Parnell's plan, which had been adopted by the Land League, as one which would not only fail to destroy the evils of landlordism, but would exclude artisans and labourers from its benefits. He also attacked its nationalist emphasis, proposing instead that workers of all the nationalities in the British Isles should unite to drive out landlord domination from the whole of the United Kingdom. For George, as for Davitt, "the real enemy was the system

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1 Ibid., pp. 57-8 and n. 57.

2 Lawrence, Henry George, p. 7.

which oppressed both the Irish and the English."[1] Davitt continued for the time being to support peasant ownership, but his thinking turned more and more toward nationalization, until at the end of his second British prison term (February 1881—May 1882) he emerged as one of its leading advocates.[2]

By mid-1880 the activities of the Irish Land League had captured the attention of not only radicals but the British public in general. Speculation was rife as to what course the new Liberal Government would follow in dealing with it. Intellectuals, economists, politicians and reformers of every political colouration eagerly poured forth their advice; Britain's leading periodicals were each printing several articles monthly on the Irish question, land reform and social problems in general. A single volume of the Nineteenth Century, for instance, (vol. VIII, July-December 1880) offered seven major articles on Ireland, as well as several on the problem of Irish "obstruction" in Parliament. It also contained a number of proposals for national insurance schemes, as well as H. M. Hyndman's "Bleeding to Death" (an attack on the economic exploitation of India) and Matthew Arnold's "The Future of Liberalism," which was cited in the last chapter. The articles on Ireland covered a wide spectrum of opinion, from the somber warning of Lord Sherbrooke (the former Robert Lowe) against any tampering with "freedom of contract" to the impassioned reply of the Irish M. P. Justin McCarthy that this "freedom" was all on the landlord's side, and that only the

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1 Ibid., pp. 7-10. George first published these views in an article on "The Irish Land Question" in the California Bee in 1879. This article, which was expanded into a 100-page pamphlet published in New York, London, Manchester and Glasgow in the spring of 1881, contains the gist of George's speeches in his first campaign in the British Isles.

2 Barry, Nationalisation, pp. 58-9.

most serious curtailment of it could prevent an even worse crisis in the future.[1]

Most of the articles, including these, focused on the grievances of the tenant farmer. One, however — "The Irish 'Poor Man'," by Charlotte G. O'Brien — took up the cause of the totally landless classes. Miss O'Brien pointed out that the widely-expected legislation for the security of the farmers would do nothing for the agricultural labourers, the village artisans and unskilled town workers — the most desperate and "dangerous" elements of the Irish population. Her picture of the labourer's plight exemplifies the kind of view of the Irish crisis which would lead many English radicals to reject lesser land reforms in favour of nationalization.[2] Here is her summary of the typical expectations of an "industrious and sober" young farm labourer:

> A house that no other European peasant would occupy, two shillings a day, or possibly two and sixpence in stirring times, but more probably one-and-sixpence or even less. If he is fortunate enough to hold a bit of land from the farmer who employs him, he, as a rule, is compelled to pay twice its value or more ... the labourer has to fence, manure, etc. the bit of land, and has no security either for it or for his house; for the latter, bad as it is, he pays from one pound to five pound a year. He is absolutely at the mercy of the farmer, and is only too frequently hounded

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1 Lord Sherbrooke, "Legislation for Ireland," Nineteenth Century, Vol. III, November 1880; Justin McCarthy, "Ireland in '48 and Ireland Now," ibid., December 1880.

2 Ibid., December 1880. Miss O'Brien's own solution did not go that far, although her object — "to put good houses and good plots of land within the reach of any industrious man" — was the same. She recommended a kind of compulsory Government land purchase scheme which would take about one acre in twenty from estates, large farms and wastes. This land would then be let out to labourers in small plots, usually with cottages, a portion of each year's rent going toward purchase.

> to and from his work with curses like a dog. If he defies his employer, his house, his bit of land, his wages, all go at once; he is left as a waif to travel the road with his helpless family, glad to find some miserable cabin wherein he can lay himself and them by the fireside and pay a shilling a week for a bit of straw and a roof.[1]

Town workers and village artisans usually had somewhat better wages, but their work was "uncertain," and they too had "no hope of a home."[2] The whole Irish labouring class, according to Miss O'Brien, was "fighting for its life." The labourers would no longer suffer silently, both because of the new acuteness of their distress and because they sensed that "in the present settlement of the land question is their time — it is now or never with them. Their experience of the farming classes leads them to expect in them harsher masters than in the landlords."[3]

Charles Bradlaugh's Land Law Reform League proved abortive, as noted above; but the public debate over Ireland's troubles soon inspired another and more radical land reform organization. The start of the new British campaign against private control of the land, soon to be augmented by Henry George, may be dated from November, 1880, when Alfred Russel Wallace published his article "How to Nationalise the Land; a Radical Solution of the Irish Problem" in the Contemporary Review.

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1 Ibid., pp. 876-7.

2 Ibid.

3 Incidentally, the socialist journal Justice claimed in early 1884 that this was just what had happened under the Land Act of 1881: the Act had done nothing for the labourers, the farmers who had benefited were exploiting them selfishly, and they were possibly worse off than before. It praised Michael Davitt for pointing this out and advocating land nationalization as the solution.

Wallace, an explorer and naturalist, apparently knew nothing of the long history of popular radical agitation for land nationalization. However, his scheme for gradual public acquisition of the land over several generations was not unlike Bronterre O'Brien's. The present owner of each property could keep his land, as could his heirs to the fourth generation. But any sale would count as one generation, and the land of anyone dying without a near relative would become state property immediately on his death. After a property was "nationalized," it would be subject to a ground rent, but the occupier could remain as long as he liked, with freedom of cultivation and the right to sell his interest, although he could not sub-let or mortgage. Unenclosed commons and moors would also go to the State, as would the land in towns, so that owners of urban property would also be obliged to pay a ground rent.[1]

With the State as universal landlord, it was expected that fair rents and security of tenure would prevail, property speculation would be ended, and idle land would be cultivated. Holding land would be of no benefit to anyone but the person who intended to make use of it for agricultural or industrial purposes, and the State revenues would be used for worthwhile public purposes. Workers could easily obtain smallholdings as an alternative or supplement to wage-labour; the alarming exodus from the land would be halted, preserving the traditional agrarian life and the sturdy peasant virtues that seemed to be slipping away: These were the essential goals of Wallace's plan, as of other schemes of public land ownership or the "Single Tax" on land, however they varied in detail.

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1 Barry, Nationalisation, p. 58.

The attention attracted by Wallace's article led to the formation of the Land Nationalisation Society in March, 1881. The initial meeting took place in the same week as the first of the series of meetings held that spring to organize the Democratic Federation, which was officially launched in June with land nationalization in its programme (as well as Irish Home Rule and a number of radical political reforms). Many of the same people were involved at the outset in both organizations. Several founder-members of the LNS were also founders of the Federation and took a prominent part in the work of its first two years, including Dr. G. B. Clark (formerly connected with the IWMA and later M.P. for Caithness), Patrick Hennessey, who had been president of the old Land and Labour League, and the radical civil servant Harbert Burrows, who was to remain active in the Federation for many years. Helen Taylor was one of the most prominent and zealous members of both societies in the early eighties. The young middle-class radicals H. H. Champion and R. P. B. Frost, who would join the Federation just before its decisive swing to socialism in 1883, were also early LNS members; and Hyndman at least occasionally took part in the society's activities.[1]

Like the Federation, the LNS was to be a long-lived organization, remaining active through the late-Victorian period and long afterwards and gaining considerable influence. Its membership was very small initially, and it apparently could not agree on a specific programme and had little impact for the first year or so, but it became firmly established in the next few years as popular enthusiasm for land nationaliza-

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1 J. Morrison Davidson, The Annals of Toil (1899), pp. 413-14, quoting information from A. C. Swinton, first treasurer and initial organizer of the LNS; Report of the Land Nationalisation Society, 1881-3, pp. 7-8, 1883-4, pp. 23-4, and 1884-5, p. 17; Radical, 4 February 1882 and 10 June 1882.

tion reached much greater heights.[1]

The foundation of the LNS, then, marked the beginning of the new land nationalization campaign of the eighties. But its full impact did not come until the years following 1881 when the charismatic influence of Henry George began to be felt. George was a superb propagandist by tongue or pen. Far more than Wallace and the LNS, he was to capture the imagination of the younger generation of middle-class intellectuals and radical working men and turn their attention to the economic basis of social problems. But Progress and Poverty, which eventually sold over 100,000 copies in Britain alone, was not accepted by a British publisher until late 1880, after George had made many fruitless efforts to get the book noticed here.[2] It attracted little attention until it caught the eye of the Radical's editors in the spring of 1881. By then, however, the time was exactly right for the book to have the maximum effect on British popular radicalism; the political revolt against the Liberal coercion policy in Ireland, added to the radical excitement created by the agrarian crisis itself, had thoroughly prepared the ground for George. More will be said later of George's influence, but first the impact of the Anti-Coercion revolt must be considered.

Liberal Coercion and Radical Disillusionment

While the agrarian side of the Irish crisis was reviving radical interest in land reform, its political side stirred a revolt against the Liberal attachment: a small and limited revolt, to be sure, but one

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1 Davidson, loc. cit.; Barry, Nationalisation, pp. 65-70; Radical, 4 February and 10 June 1882.

2 Lawrence, Henry George, pp. 7-8.

which undoubtedly hastened the beginnings of organized socialism.

During the late seventies Gladstone, with his noted flair for focusing public attention on one great dramatic cause, had firmly established himself as the idol of most sections of Liberal and radical opinion and had made his personal popularity the major force holding the Liberal Party together.[1] Gladstone's great cause in these years was the "Eastern Question." His forceful campaign against Beaconsfield's plan for intervention in the Balkan conflict on the side of Turkey, and his own hands-off position, favouring the anti-Turkish rebels and their ally Russia, placed him clearly on the popular side of the issue. His eloquent attacks on "Beaconsfieldism" made him many bitter enemies in Parliament (and some outside, among persons so various as the Queen and the eccentric Tory-Radical H. M. Hyndman), but his apparent opposition to aggressive nationalism contributed greatly to his immense popular support in 1880.[2]

"Nobody ... who did not live through this period," Hyndman wrote later, "can form any conception of the personal adoration felt for Mr. Gladstone by his supporters. To attack him, even to criticize any of his measures, speeches, or writings, was nothing short of an outrage

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1 See Hammond, Gladstone, pp. 164-72 and D. A. Hamer, Liberal Politics in the Age of Gladstone and Rosebery (1972), pp. 79-98 for the political effects of Gladstone's preference for concentrating on one great issue at a time. Both historians, but especially Hamer, stress the long-term negative effects of Gladstone's single-mindedness, claiming that while it enabled him to rally vast popular support on a given issue, it hampered the development of clear Liberal priorities and contributed to the party's tendency toward drift and disunity, which in turn helped to push dissatisfied radicals toward socialism.

2 Hammond, Gladstone, pp. 143-4.

upon morality and religion."[1] With the end of six years of Tory rule and what they believed was the final defeat of "Beaconfieldism," radicals were in something of a state of euphoria after the 1880 General Election. The strongly Whiggish complexion of the new Government notwithstanding, all of them except a "hard core" of ultra-radicals and exiled foreign revolutionists expected that with Gladstone in power and men like Chamberlain, Dilke and John Bright in office, a real change of direction was at hand: domestic affairs would come to the fore and the way would be clear for major political and social reforms.

With such a background of hero-worship and high hopes, radicals were to be much more frustrated at the actual turn of events than they might have been if the Conservatives, of whom they expected little, had remained in power. The new Liberal Government's handling of the Irish crisis was to be the chief trigger of radical disaffection; but its military interventions in Egypt, India, Afghanistan and South Africa also contributed to the dismay and disillusionment which, at least for the more extreme radicals, quickly followed the celebration of Gladstone's electoral triumph. Coercion in Ireland, viewed as a betrayal of Liberal ideals of political freedom, plus colonial wars, viewed as naked aggression in the cause of glory and profit, plus foot-dragging on major domestic questions like local government reform and extension of the county franchise, soon brought angry criticisms in the popular radical

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1 The Record of an Adventurous Life, p. 203.

press and the workingmen's radical clubs.[1] In these circles the more militant immediately raised the cry of "Liberal hypocrisy": After winning office on the strength of their campaign against "Beaconsfield-ism," the Liberals seemed to be making the Tory leader's hated policies their own.

Here was the first real sign since the short-lived outburst of popular radical militance in the early seventies that a significant radical breakaway from the long-standing Liberal alliance might be at hand. Until 1880, and especially during the period of Tory rule from 1874, the Liberal Party had seemed to be "still the great progressive political force, its possibilities still apparently far from exhausted."[2] But the question of continuing under Liberal leadership "became a rather different issue in the 1880s when it had been given a further trial and its limitations ... had been much more clearly revealed."[3]

At first, however, this mood of revolt against the Liberal alliance embraced only a small group: the most extreme radical workingmen and those most sympathetic to the Irish (usually the same people); the little circle of exiled foreign revolutionists; a few middle-class

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1 Helen Lynd goes so far as to say that "the years 1880 to 1885 might be entitled Disillusionment with Liberalism" (England in the Eighteen-Eighties, p. 219); see her excerpts from Reynolds's Newspaper illustrating the progress of this mood of disaffection (ibid., pp. 222-3). For its effects as an impetus toward "united action" for social change among "all advanced sections" of the radical-club movement, see the recollections of Ambrose G. Barker in Freedom, May 1931.

2 D. W. Crowley, "The Origins of the Revolt of the British Labour Movement from Liberalism, 1875-1906" (Ph. D. thesis, University of London, 1952), p. 66.

3 Ibid.

renegades like Hyndman, Bax, or Morris; a small handful of well-known Anti-Coercion politicians like Joseph Cowen, Radical M. P. for New-Castle, or the Irish M. P. Justin McCarthy. It is within this milieu -- not to be confused with the better-known radical circle identified with Chamberlain and Dilke -- that we find the "New Party" sentiment which led to the founding of the Democratic Federation and later to the emergence of socialism.[1]

These "New Party" radicals, characterized by a "plague on both your houses" attitude toward the great parties, were also too socially heterogeneous and too far left politically (too "advanced," in their own terminology) to be identified with the labour movement proper, although some of them were trade unionists. On the whole, foreshadowing the attitude adopted by the Federation, they criticized the unions for exclusiveness and conservatism and regarded the older generation of labour leaders as hopelessly tied to respectable mainstream Liberalism.[2]

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1 The detailed story of the Federation's foundation as an attempt to unify anti-Liberal, pro-Irish, pro-Labour and generally ultra-radical feeling under the banner of a new independent radical party must be reserved for a later chapter. The remainder of this chapter, while making occasional reference to the Federation, will be mainly concerned with the forces at work within the radical milieu from which the Federation sprang which foreshadowed its evolution into a small socialist sect instead of the large radical party that most of its earliest members had in mind.

2 See the Radical's comments on this theme, e.g.: Trade unions had done much good, but their actions were too often "mean, paltry or vacillating," they were "too narrow and exclusive," and their leaders were too much under the "insidious and corrupting influence" of Liberal and Tory political agents (17 September 1881). This, of course, was Hyndman's attitude for many years, and it is often expressed in Justice during the paper's early years. It took the "New Unionism" and a new generation of respected labour leaders who were also socialists -- epitomized by a Tom Mann or a Keir Hardie -- to permanently modify this view and encourage a more active co-operation of the SDF, and socialists generally, with the trade unions.

They tended, perhaps, to forget the earlier struggles of these men for the very existence of the unions, when "far from meekly bowing the neck to the official Liberal-Capitalism of the day, they fought strenuously against...a hostility to unionism almost beyond the conception" of the rising generation.[1] But they were correct in perceiving that, except for their own limited circle, the early 1880s belonged to the heyday of "Lib-Lab-ism": Until the end of the decade or later, "the loyalty of the majority of the skilled trade unionists to Gladstonian Liberalism was still unbroken, and the apathy of the masses of the unskilled had scarcely been stirred."[2]

The circle of pro-Irish, anti-Liberal "new Party" radicals was closely associated with the network of workingmen's radical clubs, which by 1880 had become "a strong political force in the land," especially in London, where every district had one or more.[3] Their main purpose was to serve as centres for social gatherings, lectures and political debate; since they did not canvass or raise funds for the Liberal Party, though often nominally allied with it, they were relatively independent.

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1 Crowley, Origins of the Revolt of the British Labour Movement, p. 38. The same view of the mid-Victorian labour movement -- that it was really much more militant in the context of its own time than it seemed in retrospect, especially to the Socialists — is taken in R. V. Clements, "British Trade Unions and Popular Political Economy, 1850-1875," Economic History Review, 2d series, Vol. 14 (1961-62), pp. 93-104. For an illustration of the growth of discontent with the "Lib-Lab" alliance in the eighties, see Helen Lynd's series of extracts from commentary on Labour politics in Reynolds's Newspaper (England in the Eighteen-Eighties, pp. 273-4).

2 E. P. Thompson, William Morris, p. 345.

3 E. B. Bax, Reminiscences and Reflexions, p. 73. For a discussion of certain clubs which were particularly influential in the grass-roots development of socialist ideas from about this time, see Chapter VI below.

The rank-and-file members, at any rate, "were fully aware of the distinction of their radicalism, secularist and republican, with its traditions of Paine, the Chartists and the French Commune, from the milder doctrines of official Liberalism."[1] From the mid-seventies, political discussion in the radical clubs had been stimulated first by the "Eastern Question" and then by the Irish revolt and the Coercion issue; soon it was to be further enlivened by Henry George. The strength of popular radical support for Bradlaugh and the secularist cause has been noted already; the secularism of the clubs was frequently expressed in resolutions demanding secular education and the abolition of the Blasphemy Laws.[2]

The minimum reform programme supported by radical club members at this time usually included adult suffrage, payment of M. P.s, Church disestablishment and land nationalization.[3] A good guide to their expectations of the second Gladstone Government may be found in the 2 January

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1 Paul Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour, pp. 93-4. Thompson has perhaps overemphasized the clubs' independence; it was far from complete, at least from the viewpoint of extreme radicals: in their eyes the clubs all too often followed the lead of the local Liberal candidate or M. P., or of Chamberlain's National Liberal Federation. The Radical complained, for instance (14 May 1881), that most of the London clubs were not "truly independent," that they were dominated by "wire-puller" managers who tended to "go with the Caucus and the rich Liberal, while the ordinary members stick to the principles of true Radicalism."

2 P. Thompson, loc. cit.

3 Ibid. For a good summary of typical radical attitudes toward the land question, see the article "Food Prospectus," Weekly Dispatch, 14 August 1881. Radicals who leaned toward peasant proprietorship rather than nationalization also agreed with its contention that "the agricultural depression of which we hear so much is not a natural visitation...but the inevitable result of the social institution of landlordism."

1881 number of the London Weekly Dispatch.[1] The Dispatch at this time was brimming over with news of the Irish crisis, of the Land League's activities, of its contacts with English radicals and their efforts on its behalf. The leading article for this issue, "The Next Session,"[2] expresses the hope that the Government would not resort to coercion, calls for a "thorough reform of the whole Irish executive" and demands a land bill which at the least should be a "satisfactory installment of the justice that must be done to the Irish people." It insists that the "jingo weeds" growing in foreign and colonial policy must be "rooted out," pointing to the Transvaal conflict in South Africa as an example of the problem. Turning to home affairs, it demands a "vast amendment of all our discordant and faulty systems of local government" and describes the extension of the county franchise and redistribution of seats as an "indispensable" parliamentary reform to be taken up without delay.

Such were the common hopes and concerns of British popular radicalism at the beginning of 1881. Already, however, the more militant and extreme radical circle described above had begun to suspect that the Government was not of a mind to push for these reforms, and that it

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1 This paper is cited in both the Radical (4 December 1880) and George Standring's Republican (September, 1882) as having returned to "sound" radical principles under the editorship of Ashton Dilke, Newcastle M.P. and brother of Sir Charles Dilke. It was certainly one of the relatively "advanced" papers of the early eighties, although rather more moderate than the Radical.

2 When the first Coercion Act was actually passed however, the Dispatch allowed that it might be "excusable, if not justifiable" as long as the special powers of arrest and detention were not abused (13 March 1881).

would indeed enact coercion.[1] They had become vociferously critical of it during the autumn of 1880, and there was a growing feeling among them that "an effort should be made to rally together into a party the really advanced men and women," those who believed Gladstone and the Liberals were betraying "all democratic principles at home and abroad."[2]

The Radical: Voice of Revolt Against Liberalism

The new wave of militant anti-Liberalism found its most forceful expression in the Radical, a bluntly outspoken, highly emotional London weekly started as the organ of the newly-founded Anti-Coercion Association in December 1880. Ireland and the land question were the causes that gave birth to the paper. It made its debut with a plea for unity between the working people of England and Ireland against their "common enemy," the "monopoly of the land," and held up the Irish agitation as a heroic example to English radicals. Legislative independence for Ireland and land nationalization for both Ireland and Britain were its principal objects, but it also campaigned from the outset for labour representation as "a step towards that perfect equality which is the goal of all true reformers," expressing great dismay over the fact

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1 The coercion issue was apparently an extremely divisive one over the country as a whole. According to the Annual Register, the provincial press in Newcastle, Manchester, Bradford and South Wales opposed coercion, while papers in Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds, the South West and Scotland largely supported it (Hammond, Gladstone, p. 208 n. 1).

2 Hyndman, Record, p. 223.

3 Radical, 4 December 1880.

that only three out of 658 M.P.s were workingmen.[1] It soon began to encourage the idea (which now was beginning to be promoted by Hyndman and others) of a new, independent Radical-Labour political coalition — a "non-Ministerial Radical Party" to be led by the popular Newcastle M.P. Joseph Cowen, an outspoken anti-coercionist.[2] The Radical did not advocate a highly-organized, well-disciplined party with a clear-cut programme, but something more like what ultra-radical papers had demanded a decade earlier: a kind of informal bloc of independent radical M.P.s who would coalesce on important issues and hold the balance of power. Although the Radical opposed constitutions, programmes and a formal leadership structure for such a group,[3] it left no doubt that it wanted labour representatives who were truly independent of the major parties, as may be seen from its criticisms of the existing handful of "labour" M.P.s. It scorned Henry Broadhurst, who supported coercion and generally (in the Radical's view) did little for the working-class cause, as a "false friend" whose voice was "the mere re-echo of the Government Whip."[4] It did approve of "blunt, honest" Alexander Macdonald, but when he died in the autumn of 1881 it campaigned vehemently against George Howell, who was selected as "Lib-Lab" candidate for Stafford to fill Macdonald's place, calling Howell a self-serving "worshipper of success" and claiming

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1 Ibid.

2 Radical, 15 January 1881.

3 Ibid., 21 May and 11 June, 1881.

4 Ibid., 14 and 21 January, 1882.

a large share of the credit for his defeat.[1]

The Radical's views of the political world showed the angry bitterness of those who feel themselves betrayed. Gladstone's new Government seemed "likely to be memorable [only] for having falsified the hopes of those who led it to victory," and thus it was "impossible for advanced Liberals to throw in their lot with the ministers now in power." Both the great parties, for that matter, were "organized hypocrisies" in which "diplomacy rather than principle" was the guide to action. Chamberlain's apparent support of Coercion, which seemed much at odds with his reputedly ultra-democratic viewpoint, helped to inspire the Radical's blanket condemnation of him, his followers, and mainstream parliamentary radicalism in general for "hypocrisy." The paper described Chamberlain's National Liberal Federation, the supposedly radical "caucus," as "a sham, a delusion and a snare ... made use of by wily wirepullers to misrepresent the opinion of the people."[2]

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[1] Ibid., 19 November 1881.

[2] Ibid., 19 March 1881; 26 March 1881. Chamberlain did strenuously oppose coercion during the new Government's first session in 1880, and succeeded in postponing it, but because of the secrecy required by his position as a Cabinet member, this was largely unknown at the time (J.L. Garvin, Life of Chamberlain, Vol. I p. 335). In 1881, however, Chamberlain began to "shake his head over Irish disorder," as J.L. Hammond put it: Chamberlain feared that public opposition to coercion would do him more harm than good with the Caucus and most of his working-class supporters, and in any case he believed it would be impossible to get a good land bill without it. Having concluded that it would be imprudent to appear to support Irish lawlessness, Chamberlain tried to keep clear of Irish issues as much as possible in his public statements; he made no speeches in the House of Commons on any Irish subject throughout 1881. In Hammond's view, Chamberlain had "created a kind of Frankenstein's monster in the caucus, for he was too apt to ask himself whether a particular measure would please or displease it" (Gladstone and the Irish Nation, pp. 208-9). By 1881 the circle for whom the Radical spoke had come to regard the Caucus as an English version of the corrupt American-style political "machine": on this see Henry Pelling, America and the British Left (1956), p. 48, and Hyndman in the Radical, 1 April 1882.

Lord Beaconsfield, according to the Radical, had "discovered that glory could be had very cheaply by making war on savage tribes," and Gladstone was following his "evil example," except that now "the badly clothed and underfed Irish" were to be made the principal "victims of the thirst for blood." Such leadership reflected the growth of a new "fashion in the middle and higher classes ... to be on the side of the big battalions."[1] When Gladstone first announced his forthcoming Irish Land Bill in April of 1881, the Radical temporarily moderated the fierce attacks in this vein that it had published week after week as the Coercion Acts were debated and passed. It allowed that the projected establishment of a Land Court and recognition of the principle of Tenant Right could make "a very considerable contribution towards a settlement."[2] After the text of the bill had become available, the Radical went so far as to say that it could be "the beginning of a thorough and radical reform of the existing land system throughout the United Kingdom," even the "thin end of the wedge" for the abolition of private property in land, if it could be got through Parliament without major alteration.[3]

But this was not to be, and as the bill ran into rough weather and Gladstone had to trim its sails, the Radical soon concluded that it would prove abortive in the end. The paper returned to a position of unmodified disaffection with the Government and all its works. When Parnell was imprisoned in October 1881, the Radical announced that it had abandoned all effort to believe that there was "something in the

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1 Radical, 5 February 1881.

2 Ibid., 9 April 1881

3 Ibid., 16 April 1881.

nature of good intentions" in the Liberal leaders. Claiming that it could not "find language strong enough to express our contempt," it nevertheless tried hard to do so: the Liberals were reviled as a party of "scoundrels, liars and hypocrites," and Gladstone was their "chief sinner," a corrupt "jack-in-office" and a "Judas Iscariot."[1]

With this attitude toward Gladstone, the Liberals, and mainstream politics in general, it is not surprising that the Radical won the praise of the inveterate Gladstone-hater H. M. Hyndman. The Radical's editors, he noted in his reminiscences,

> did their full share ... to rouse a sense of independence among the workers, when the great majority of the Liberal Party were grovelling before Mr. Gladstone and his pet Whig Coercionists.[2]

During its short life (4 December 1880 -- 8 July 1882) the Radical also publicized the most advanced views of the day on every aspect of the "social question." It sympathetically reported the activities of every group that opposed the political and social status quo. As the leading popular organ of the radical revolt against Liberalism at this time, it would seem to be worth looking at more closely: More clearly, perhaps, than any other paper, it shows how the forces which led to the rise of socialism were operating within the milieu of London popular radicalism at the beginning of the eighties.

The background of the man who took the initiative in starting the Radical illustrates the difficulty of trying to apply a class label —

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1 Ibid., 15 October 1881.

2 The Record of an Adventurous Life, p. 223.

or indeed any easy identifying phrase — to the movement of which he was a part. This ultra-radical movement, like the socialist movement that grew up within it, involved some people who were clearly "working-class," some who were definitely "middle-class," and others, like Francis W. Soutter, who had a foot in both worlds. Soutter, born in Lambeth in 1844, seems to have had a middle-class upbringing in his early years. His Scottish father, manager of a tobacco firm, was prosperous enough to keep several servants; his mother's family owned a number of London pubs and restaurants. But Soutter was suddenly left an orphan at the age of eleven without financial support. He was brought up by the mother of one of his family's servants and worked at various jobs from an early age, ultimately becoming a journeyman carpenter and joiner.

Soutter's long career in Southwark radical politics began when he took part in George Odger's independent campaign as a "Labour" candidate for Parliament in 1869 (Soutter had been inspired, he said, by reading a "vigorous exposition of the case for Labour representation" by the Chartist leader William Lovett).[1] From 1876, the year of her first successful School Board candidacy, Soutter served as a political adviser to Helen Taylor,[2] who took a prominent part in the Anti-Coercion agitation and afterwards was active for many years in both the socialist and land nationalization movements. In 1879 Soutter was one of the group of Southwark radicals who supported the independent parliamentary

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1 F. W. Soutter, Recollections of a Labour Pioneer (1923), pp. 25-6.

2 Ibid., pp. 90-91. For more on Helen Taylor and her connections with Southwark radicalism and the early Democratic Federation, see Chapter VI, below, pp. 228-31 and Chapter VII, pp. 264; 289-90.

candidacy of George Shipton of the London Trades Council, who became editor of the new Labour Standard in 1881.[1]

Late the following year, Soutter gave up his job as manager of a small timber business to start the Radical. The idea for the paper grew out of an incident at a meeting of the Anti-Coercion Association: When it was announced that the featured speaker, an M. P., would not be able to appear, all the reporters present pocketed their notebooks and walked out. Soutter and a few others suggested that the group ought to publish its own paper, but most of the members threw cold water on the proposal. Soutter was determined, nevertheless, and got the paper started with the help of "that good Scotch radical, William Webster," and Samuel Bennett, a barrister, journalist and small publisher and bookseller. These three had also the encouragement of Soutter's "old and valued friend" Herbert Burrows (who would soon participate in the founding of the Democratic Federation) and T. P. O'Connor, the Irish M.P. who in 1888 would start another and more famous popular radical paper, the London Star.[2]

Bennett and Soutter evidently played equally prominent parts in both the formation of the Anti-Coercion Association, of which they were co-secretaries, and the publishing of the Radical. During the late 1870s, while Soutter had been making himself anathema to local Liberals as secretary of the Southwark Radical Club, Bennett was the

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1 Ibid., p. 79. Odger's 1869 candidacy in a three-cornered race secured a very respectable poll, but Shipton's campaign (also against both a Liberal and a Tory) was a "fiasco" according to Soutter, who complained that "virtually nothing" could be got from the trade unions in support of these early "Labour" campaigns.

2 Ibid., pp. 100-102; p. 115.

secretary and leading spirit of the Lambeth Radical Association, a body made up mostly of radical journalists living in South London. The Lambeth group evidently was basically a discussion group, more politically than socially oriented, although many of its members were advocates of J. S. Mill's plan for taxing the "unearned increment" of land values for public purposes. After it broke up because of disagreements over the 1880 General Election, Bennett and its "advanced guard" (including O'Connor and the well-known radical journalist J. Morrison Davidson) joined forces with Soutter's group of pro-Irish, anti-Liberal workingmen, with Helen Taylor and with ultra-radical and Irish groups around London to co-ordinate the protest against Liberal coercion.[1]

It is hard to tell who did most of the writing in the Radical, as most of its articles were unsigned until the last few months. Soutter and Bennett apparently shared the primary responsibility for keeping the paper going, with Webster, "a man of one idea" (land nationalization) as their "principal contributor from soon after the start to the finish." Davidson also helped out toward the end. Soutter devoted his full energies to the paper for over a year, until he was "starved out" in early 1882 and forced to return to full-time work at his trade.[2] Like most such ventures, the Radical had proved a "costly failure" financially. Bennett kept on publishing it for a few more months until his attempt to transfer it to a company fell through. The paper then had to be folded, leaving Bennett hundreds of pounds in debt -- and a large gap

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1 Davidson, Annals of Toil, pp. 391-2; Harry Quelch in H. H. Hyndman et. al., How I Became a Socialist (undated reprint of the 1894-6 Justice series), pp. 72-3.

2 Soutter, Recollections, pp. 111-115, p. 126; Radical, 10 June 1882.

in week-to-week reporting on advanced-radical London and the nascent socialist movement.[1]

While it lasted, however, the Radical kept its readers closely in touch with the ideas and activities of the radical clubs, the secular societies, the land-reform groups, the little community of foreign political exiles — all the interrelated movements, in fact, which in the next few years would provide recruits for the new socialism. Though it disappeared before a distinctly socialist movement had yet emerged, its reports of meetings and agitations, its book reviews, advertisements and lecture notices suggest a growing popular interest in socialism and in reforms that were compatible with socialist aims. Soutter, Bennett and Webster were not socialists — at least not in 1881-2 —[2] but the views they expressed in the Radical were often very similar in tone to the rhetoric of the early socialist movement. A few examples from the Radical will help indicate the extent to which they and their circle had become sympathetic to socialist ideas.

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1 Soutter, Recollections, p. 126. Some details of the attempt to save the Radical may be gleaned from reports in the last few issues. A number of Democratic Federation members, including Hyndman, Dr. G. B. Clark, Herbert Burrows and the Murray brothers, are named as taking part in these efforts (see esp. the 10 June 1882 issue). The Radical was one of the few papers to take more than passing notice of the founding of the Federation, and reported and commented on its earliest activities in more detail than any other. This material, however, may be treated more appropriately in a later chapter.

2 Soutter was a foundation member of the Democratic Federation, remained with it after it became an avowed socialist body and considered himself a socialist at least for a time; and by 1885 Bennett described his views as "socialistic": See Chapter VI below, pp. 231-34. During the Radical's life, however, they and Webster could perhaps be best described as anti-monopolists with some socialist tendencies.

The Radical writers firmly believed that an "international war ... against the monopolists of wealth and power" was beginning. Its success depended upon "the people themselves," not the politicians; ordinary people had to "make an effort — to combine, to teach one another, to enroll themselves as soldiers in the army of Progress."[1] The duty of all true "Radicals and Democrats" was to forsake "the party warfare which passes for high politics in this country," and instead

> to spread the doctrines of the New Faith —
> the Practical and Material Religion — that
> the world was made, not for a few, but for all;
> that misery and want should not be the rule but
> the exception; that Legislatures and Governments
> are not the masters but the servants of the people...
> that there are...not only the rights but the duties
> of man.[2]

The "Army of Progress" (a favourite metaphor in the Radical) was an international one, including "the people of all races and of all creeds." English working people were urged not to let their "hereditary enemies" at home distract them from the real struggle by means of foreign military adventures and appeals to national, racial and religious prejudices. They were told that there was not a country in Europe, even Republican France, whose government deserved the respect of the people; a revolution was needed everywhere, and "to be of any use" it had to be "social even more than political."[3] Such an upheaval indeed seemed close at hand, even if "poor, good-natured, stupid, stolid England" lagged "as usual" in the rear: "The Revolution is coming; may it be thorough and

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1 Radical, 18 June 1881.

2 Samuel Bennett, "The New Faith," ibid., 28 January 1882.

3 Radical, 4 March 1882.

world-wide, sweeping before it, and abolishing forever, all autocratic rulers, privileged classes, and brute force institutions."[1]

For the men of the Radical the "privileged classes" were always first and foremost the landed classes, and land nationalization was the principal item in the revolutionary programme,[2] especially after their discovery of Henry George in the spring of 1881.[3] From this time forward, the benefits that would flow from land nationalization knew no bounds in the imagination of the Radical's leader writers. All other reform questions, including that of "the relations of Labour and Capital," were expected to "find their stimulus, as they will find their solution, in the radical settlement of the land question."[4] This, as Samuel Bennett expressed it, was the question before which all other questions "sink into insignificance."[5]

However, as the quotations already given here may suggest, the revolution to be initiated by nationalization of the land was not a revolt against the landlord class alone. If the landed aristocracy and

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1 Ibid., 17 September 1881.

2 Particularly for Bennett and Webster, it may be gathered from their signed articles, which become quite frequent in the paper's last few months. Soutter apparently was less single-mindedly concerned with the land question, and more interested in labour representation, the "New Party" movement and municipal corruption (he wrote a long series of articles for the Radical exposing "Vestry Villainy," and devoted much of his reminiscences to accounts of his campaigns against it).

3 It was evidently Webster, who became known as "the discoverer of Henry George," who first brought Progress and Poverty to the attention of radical workingmen. His enthusiastic series of expository articles on the book marked the beginning of the surge of popular interest in George's social gospel (Davidson, Annals, p. 393).

4 Radical, 23 July 1881.

5 Ibid., 4 March 1882.

gentry were the chief class enemy, the "commercial aristocracy" was coming to be viewed as an enemy also -- or at the least as a class to be regarded with strong suspicion: Workers were warned to keep firmly on their guard, lest while they were "struggling with the Privileged Classes for the social and political emancipation of the People, the Commercial Class should glide in and snatch the fruits of the coming victory."[1] Toward the end of the Radical's life this idea seems to appear more frequently. One more often finds an explicit editorial criticism of capitalists or an attack on "capitalist radicalism"[2] such as this item from the front-page notes and comments: "Joseph Chamberlain and John Bright going to Court in Windsor uniform and black velvet dress ought to be convincing proof of the genuineness of Capitalist Radicalism, not to say Republicanism."[3]

This does not, of course, necessarily mean that the Radical writers were actually on the point of fully accepting socialism, or even that they had any very sophisticated understanding of it. It would be surprising if they did have as early as 1881 or 82, for until about 1884[4] there was little satisfactory reading on the subject in English.

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1 Ibid., 16 July 1881.

2 In addition to the references (also increasingly frequent) in reader's letters or other outside contributions, most notably those from Hyndman and the Democratic Federation.

3 Radical, 6 May 1882.

4 Such popular expositions as did exist -- e.g. John Sketchley's Principles of Social Democracy (1879) or Hyndman's England for All (1881) -- tended to be vague and contradictory, reflecting the ideological confusion that prevailed in the first years of the eighties as various European socialist doctrines (including Marxism, Lasalleism, the compromise 1875 "Gotha Programme" of the German Social Democrats, and Kropotkin-type anarchist-communism) competed for acceptance with each other and with the native Owenite and Chartist traditions: see Barry, Nationalisation, pp. 130-36.

Their own position was still primarily anti-monopolist, as is indicated by their usual emphasis on negative reform, i.e. on the destruction of privilege and monopoly instead of on positive proposals aimed at a co-operative economic system. Actually there is relatively little editorial discussion of socialism per se in the Radical (though the paper contains other indications of growing popular interest in it, as will be seen presently). When the Radical writers did comment on socialism, they did so mainly with regard to its apparent compatibility with land nationalization. They professed, for instance, to find nothing alarming (for anyone but "monopolists") in communism if "the study of first principles" should lead in that direction. But their own "first principle" was nationalization of the land, and they felt that this was "in truth, the first step in practical socialism."[1]

This "first step," however, was of such overwhelming importance to them that they said little of the steps to come afterward -- nothing really more specific than the following:

> Socialism seems the direction in which we are all traveling; but we must go towards it by easy stages -- first, the nationalization of the land; secondly, the institution of free education; thirdly, the formation of state workshops where everyone unable to obtain employment elsewhere, could as a matter of right demand the means of earning the wherewithal to live.[2]

All these proposals became part of the Democratic Federation's programme by the spring of 1883 (only land nationalization was included from the outset), and by that time they were being clearly labelled

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1 "Practical Socialism," Radical, 16 July 1881.

2 Radical, 10 September 1881.

as temporary "palliatives" or "stepping stones" on the path to social-
ism.[1] This shows something of the continuity between radical and early socialist demands; none of these proposals was really new, even when the Radical put them forward. But, unlike the leaders of the Federation in 1883 and afterward, the Radical writers seemed to regard them as ends in themselves. They showed little inclination to consider what further steps toward socialism might be or ought to be taken, and apparently did not envision any further extension of State ownership and control of industry beyond what is implied in the idea of "State Workshops" as employers of last resort. For them this seems to have been more of an extension of the old radical demand for "Home Colonization" than a "stepping stone" to any clearly conceived form of socialism.

Indeed, to avoid a misreading of the Radical's comments on socialism in 1881 or 82, it must be kept in mind that at this time "socialism" was an even more vague and variously understood concept than it is today.[2] Nor could anyone have been certain in the early eighties that the dominant form of socialism in Britain would be one which would aim at centralized State ownership of the land and all industrial capital

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1 Hyndman, Record p. 296, p. 313 (Hyndman was in error here in giving the date of the Federation's series of conferences on "stepping stones to Socialism" as 1882. The conferences actually were held early in 1883); Bax, Reminiscences and Reflexions, p. 74.

2 It may be helpful to note here that the present writer, in attempting to distinguish between socialist and non-socialist positions, has considered to be "socialists" only those who demanded the substitution of co-operation for competition as the governing principle of economic life, and advocated some form of common ownership of the means of production other than land toward this end.

(and would thus be compatible with the existing movements for the nationalization of land, coalmines and railways).[1]

From the viewpoint of the general public, anyone who advocated any very radical or extensive legislation for the purpose of improving social conditions might be considered a socialist. Henry George, for instance, was closely identified with socialism in the public mind for several years, and did little initially to repudiate the connection, though he never abandoned his faith in free trade and free enterprise. The socialist label was even applied to Joseph Chamberlain, whose principles (if not his rhetoric) were even more opposed to actual socialism than George's.[2] For a few, socialism still meant the philosophy of Robert Owen; but more commonly now it was confused with anarchism, and it served as a bogy-word for the most violent, irrational kind of bomb-throwing revolutionary zealotry.[3]

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1 All the competing varieties of "socialism" in this early period, European or native, were anti-capitalist, but all were "aiming at different forms of 'collective' or 'common' ownership." The basic conflict was over the degree of centralization, i.e., state ownership and management vs. the voluntary-association principle. That British socialism came to be predominantly centralist was "due as much to the traditional radical demands for political democracy and land nationalization as to the influence of Marxism" (Barry, Nationalisation, pp. 130-33).

2 Garvin, Chamberlain, p. 557; Hamer, Liberal Politics, pp. 103-4; Justice, 14 February 1885.

3 E. P. Thompson, William Morris, pp. 315-317; Hyndman, Record, pp. 223-4. As Hyndman recalled, "public opinion was not only indifferent" to socialism, "it was bitterly hostile in every way." The word "socialist" had come to stand in the British Press for "a bomb-thrower and an incendiary, and Socialism itself was constantly referred to as an Anarchist revolt against civilisation, social organisation, and humanity at large." But this, as Thompson has said, was at least "in part a recognition that modern socialism now meant European Socialism." Thompson adds that "it was from European sources that the Socialism of the 1880s drew both its theory and its initial impetus." This is of course largely true, as material from the Radical discussed in the following pages tends to confirm. But a significant part of the impetus came from the domestic radical ferment at this time, and the theory was strongly influenced by native radical traditions, as the Radical also helps to make clear.

The Radical's concept of socialism, so far as it had any definite concept, is difficult to pin down exactly. There is not really enough specific comment on the subject. However, it is at least clear that the paper spoke for a section of radical opinion which was severely disillusioned with conventional politics, and which was convinced of the reality of class conflict and the need for international working-class unity: a group which looked upon socialists as their allies in a common struggle, as part of the same movement of "the people" against the "privileged classes" that they themselves belonged to.

The Radical took a strong interest in the foreign socialist parties, particularly the German Social Democrats, and their exiled members in England, sympathetically reporting the meetings and activities of the London exiles and expressing admiration for them as men of strong principle. English radicals, it urged, could learn important lessons from these refugees -- "lessons in devotion, earnestness, and self-sacrifice" -- and meanwhile could impress upon them the desirability of "peaceful means" for change. A union had to take place "before any of the struggling nationalities can hope to emancipate themselves"; radicals and revolutionists of all nationalities had to co-operate to ensure the success of "the great war ... against Kings and aristocracies, against landlords and capitalists, against everything in the nature of monopoly and for the benefit of all the people."[1]

If the foreign socialists held esoteric and sometimes violent beliefs, they were regarded nevertheless as friends, while conventional politicians most definitely were not. "It is time that a broad line of

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[1] Radical, 25 March 1882.

separation be drawn between Radicals and their political enemies, the Whig-Tory Party," editorialized the Radical in its 2 July 1881 number: "these oligarchs" were "National Enemies," traditionally opposed to "the social development of the people." The foreign exiles of the "Working Men's Social Democratic Club" (the Rose Street club and its several offshoots) were referred to, in contrast, as "our friends the Socialists."[1] One of the exiles, Andreas Scheu of Vienna, was described in an interview as "a grateful aquisition to English society ... one of the gentlest, brightest, and most genial of men."[2] The article quotes Scheu's defence of socialism against the criticism that it would "destroy initiative" with apparent approval[3] and emphasizes the strength of the German Social Democrats, giving a highly sympathetic account of the party's origins and struggles.

Turning from the Radical's editorial content to its lecture listings and reports of radical club activity, one finds further evidence

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1 Ibid., 9 July 1881. In this instance the phrase occurs in a report on the annual Sunday picnic of "all the foreign Social Democrats" in Epping Forest. Here the Radical, with tongue in cheek, congratulates the Tory St. James Gazette (which had also carried an account of the picnic) for a belated recognition that Socialists were at bottom ordinary people capable of ordinary human enjoyments. The picture of the picnic itself is a colourful one, and suggests the developing contacts between the exiles and some of the most militant native radicals: "Two or three hundred" men, women and children were present -- Germans, Russians, French, Swiss, Poles, Italians -- along with a few English, particularly some of the Magna Charta Association, one of whose officials, "an honest little milkman" had contributed "all his scanty savings to the cause." With red flags flying, the company had passed the day under the great trees, eating, singing and dancing.

2 Ibid., 28 May 1881.

3 Scheu, who described himself as an "art-workman" (he was a carver and gilder by trade) held essentially the same views as William Morris, with whom he shared a special passion for art and beauty in everyday life. Scheu had a hand in Morris's "conversion" about the beginning of 1883, and the two became close associates.

of growing interest in the German socialists and in socialist ideas generally. It is clear that working-class representation, "socialism vs. capitalism" and "the principles of social democracy" were being frequently discussed along with land nationalization, the Irish Question, the "crimes of the Liberal Government," the battles of the secularist movement and the failings of the American Republic.[1] All these topics were occupying the lecturers and debaters of London's radical clubs and reform societies in the spring of 1881 as Hyndman, Jack Williams, Herbert Burrows, the Murray brothers, Dr. G. B. Clark and others were attempting to unite the clubs in a new "Democratic Federation" which they hoped

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[1] The journalist William Clarke, one of the two contributors to Fabian Essays (1889) who took a Marxist and non-gradualist viewpoint (the other was Hubert Bland), explained succinctly how this new perception of America affected himself and other young British radicals in the eighties: Not only did they become disgusted by revelations of corrupt political "machines" run by omnipotent party bosses; there was "over and beyond this ... the great fact of the division between rich and poor, millionaires at one end, tramps at the other, a growth of monopolies unparalleled, crises producing abject poverty just as in Europe. These facts proved ... that new institutions were of no use along with the old forms of property; that a mere theoretic democracy, unaccompanied by any social changes, was a delusion and a snare" (Fabian Essays in Socialism, American ed., reprinted Boston, Mass., 1908, p. xxl, quoted in H. Pelling, America and the British Left, p. 65).

H. M. Hyndman, in his "How I Became a Socialist" interview in Justice (19 May 1894), noted that his several visits to America between 1871 and 1880 had helped to convince him that "mere Radical Republicanism had no good effect on the social question." He elaborated upon this in his memoirs, claiming that after his first reading of Capital during his sea voyage to America in 1880 he had begun to see Marx's lessons demonstrated in the current American scene: "Bitter class antagonisms, relentless oppression of wage-earners, frequent crises and consequent wholesale unemployment, and the simultaneous growth of vast trusts and combines, were being felt more keenly in the United States than ever before ... the Great Republic ... was as little immune from these economic scourges as the monarchies of Europe" (The Record of an Adventurous Life, p. 210).

As the Radical's lecture listings reveal, these perceptions were beginning to be disseminated in the radical clubs in 1881 and 82. A good deal of critical comment on American politics and social conditions may also be found in the paper, especially in a series of letters from an English artisan who had emigrated to Massachusetts.

would rival the influence of the National Liberal Federation.[1]

Soon after the Radical first appeared in December 1880, its pages revealed that already some club speakers were calling for "a Labour party which should be independent of the Liberal Party" and arguing that "nearly every internal struggle in a country -- whether it be Nihilism in Russia, Socialism in Germany, Communism in France, or Radicalism in England -- could be reduced to this logical fact -- a fight between the profit producer and the profit receiver."[2] During the months before the Democratic Federation was officially launched in June, 1881, labour representation and class conflict were frequent themes of radical-club discussion, judging from the Radical's "Sunday Lectures" column.[3] Typical entries announce, e.g., that Adam Weiler would address the Manhood Suffrage League on "The Political Value of Trade Unions" (March 5); that a "Mr. Cremer" (probably W. Randall Cremer, prominent trade unionist and former IWMA member) would speak to the Greenwich Radical Association on "The Necessity of Working-Class Representation" (19 February); or that Andreas Scheu was to lecture at the Southwark Radical Club on socialism and the struggles of the German Social Democrats (7 May).

The Radical also, of course, carried brief reports of some of the previous week's club meetings and lectures in each issue. From

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1 See Henry George's interview of Hyndman for the New York Irish World, reprinted in the Radical, 1 April 1882; "The New Party," Radical, 5 March 1882; and Pelling, America and the British Left, p. 48.

2 Radical, 18 and 25 December 1880, quoted in P. Thompson, Socialists, Liberals and Labour, p. 112.

3 The dates given in parentheses refer to the issues of the paper in which the notices appear, not to the days on which the lectures were to be given (or had been given, in the case of reports of past lectures). All dates are in 1881.

these we learn, for instance, that the Stratford Radical Club had heard a talk by Tom S. Lemon (the club's president and also an early Democratic Federation member) on "Parasites of Society" in which the speaker had maintained that all "non-producers," whether titled lords or tramps, were equally parasites on the rest of the community (18 June); that Charles Murray had opened a lively debate at the Manhood Suffrage League on the "want of political spirit" in the trade unions, accusing the TUC leadership of "anti-democratic" attitudes and claiming that its Parliamentary Committee followed "the second-hand views" of official Liberalism 18 June); that Adam Weiler had lectured to the same group on the Communist Manifesto of 1848 and explained Marx's interpretation of history (13 August); or that the Homerton Social Democratic Club[1] had been told that it was "the duty of the working class to organize themselves and form an independent party, as both parties in Parliament at present were their oppressors — the Tories who robbed them of their land and the Liberals or Capitalists who robbed them of the results of their toil" (20 August).

Former Chartists and IWMA members like the Murray brothers and Adam Weiler were among the most active speakers on the radical club lecture circuit. Their efforts to keep alive the traditions of Chartism

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1 This East London group, which met at a pub called the Lamb and Flag until the police prevailed upon the landlord to turn them out (Radical, 4 February 1882), was a predecessor of Joseph Lane's Labour Emancipation League, which affiliated with the Democratic Federation in 1884. The Homerton club apparently was started as a branch of the Rose Street exiles' club on the initiative of some of the club's English members, and its activities were reported in the Radical in association with the names of Jack Williams, Frank Kitz, Lane, and the Magna Chartists. For more on the Homerton Club -- probably the first group of native radical workingmen in London to advocate socialism -- see Chapter VI below, pp. 216-18.

and the "International" tied in neatly with the espousals of socialist ideas and expressions of "New Party" sentiment that were now beginning to be aired by a handful of young ultra-radical workingmen and a few others besides themselves. Hyndman, who refers in his memoirs to his "reading up of the Chartist movement" in the period before he became an "avowed Socialist,"[1] was apparently not alone in this interest; by the spring of 1881 at any rate club members might often hear a talk like Charles Murray's "Personal Recollection of the Chartist Demonstration, 10th April 1848" (9 April), or join a discussion like that led by George Wilson (another of the "men of '48," as they were called) on the question "Has Physical Force ever Benefited the People?" (12 March).

This evidence certainly seems to suggest a growing radical interest in Labour political action, the old struggles of the Chartists and the principles of the new European socialism. The extent of this interest, however, must not be exaggerated. The Radical's news and editorial columns, as well as its lecture notices, show that land reform and the Irish situation were issues of more pressing and widespread concern. Almost any week in the first half of 1881 London workingmen could listen to F. W. Soutter speaking on "Ten Days in Ireland, and What I Saw There"[2] (16 April); or James Murray on "The Irish Land Question" (9 April) or "State Ownership of Land" (4 June); or half a

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1 The Record of an Adventurous Life, p. 206.

2 Soutter made the trip in December 1880, according to his Recollections, p. 108: He met Parnell, Davitt and other leaders of the parliamentary Irish party and the Land League, and was greatly impressed by them. He was also impressed by the attention he received from the police; he claims he was "shadowed night and day" by detectives for the next nine months.

dozen similar lectures, along with a wide range of talks on other topics.[1]

Much of what these lecturers (and the Radical itself) had to say about the connection between the Irish crisis and the land question facing the whole of the United Kingdom is succinctly summed up in a correspondent's letter. John Wheelwright, who wrote almost every week as long as the Radical lasted to extol the benefits of land nationalization,[2] claimed that the Irish social problem was the same as England's, only more acute, clearly visible and easy to grasp: "In Ireland the veil is drawn aside, and landlordism and the people are face to face; in England there is a cloud between" -- i.e., the vast industrial complex that was lacking in peasant Ireland -- "and the working man does not so clearly see the working of a system that is sapping his own vitals."[3]

This, in essence, was the view of the Radical and many of the circle associated with it. For them the system of capitalist industrialism was not itself the heart of the "social problem" as it was to be for the socialists, but rather a secondary concern, an intrusive,

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1 For example: "Free Schools," "The Logic of Atheism," "Possible and Impossible Democracies" and "What Should Constitute a Democratic Platform," all to be given by a single speaker, the energetic Helen Taylor, in the week following the 4th of June (as well as a talk on German socialism); or "Thomas Carlyle, Prophet of Democracy," by Howard Evans (9 April); or J. Morrison Davidson on "The American Republic: Facts and Fictions" (9 April), or Jack Williams on the injustice of the prosecution of Johann Most (23 April. In his paper Freiheit, Most had rejoiced in violent language over the assasination of the Russian czar. The case became a cause celèbre for the Radical as a freedom of speech issue and was reported in full detail).

2 It seems uncertain whether Wheelwright really was a correspondent and not the creation of one of the editors. I have not seen the name elsewhere, which seems suspicious in the case of such an indefatigable letter writer.

3 Radical, 4 June 1881.

complicating factor that kept English workers from coming "face to face" with the really basic iniquity: "Here, as in the sister isle, the land monopoly is what weighs the people down";[1] England would be no better off than Ireland without the great industrial system that absorbed those who were prevented by landlord domination from getting a living on the land.[2]

The militant section of popular radicalism for which the Radical spoke was coming to regard the wealthy Liberals and radicals of the "Commercial Class" as false friends (especially since so many of them had supported Coercion);[3] consequently a "New Party" was being advocated, and capitalists were now being lumped together with landlords, aristocrats and royalty as oppressors of "the people." Still, however, for all but the smallest handful of ultra-radicals and foreign refugees, the main route to independence and equality (in addition to full political democracy) was land reform, not industrial reform. If the land were nationalized, it was believed, industrial oppression would soon cease to be a problem in any case: with the land available to all, no one would have to depend on wage labour for subsistence and live at the mercy of the commercial cycle. Just as the socialists would later be irritated by the failure of so many radicals to see the limitations of

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1 Ibid., 11 June 1881.

2 Ibid., 4 December 1880.

3 "The New Party," ibid., 5 March 1881. This leader castigates "these money bags in Parliament ... these upstarts ... these rich 'Radicals'" for being "ready to do anything, say anything, undo or unsay anything ... to keep their own side in and the other side out of power," and holds them primarily responsible for "the lamentable inroads on our liberty which have recently been made in that miscalled chamber of popular representatives."

"mere" land reform, so could these radicals become exasperated with the "quack remedies" of those who "refuse to see the advantages of land nationalisation."[1]

The content of the Radical, to sum up, seems to suggest both strong similarities and important differences between the extreme popular radicalism of the early eighties and the socialist position that was just beginning to emerge from it. Perhaps one of the biggest differences is that radicalism was still a rather vague affair, defining itself more through the immediate issues of the day (e.g., the Eastern Question or the Irish crisis) than through the comprehensive reform programmes and well-defined ideology typical of socialism. Yet it may be argued that those -- like the Radical writers -- who turned more and more to land nationalization and began to see in it a cure for all social ills, urban as well as agrarian, were searching for a more comprehensive philosophy. The same trend seems to be reflected in the fact that the Democratic Federation, right from its beginning as a prospective new radical party, felt the need for a point-by-point programme and a clear statement of purpose (as did other similar organizations founded at this time, like the "Democratic League of Great Britain and Ireland," which affiliated with the Federation in 1882). Even Chamberlain's milder radicalism of the "Unauthorized Programme" shows the same tendency toward a more comprehensive, "programmatic" approach to reform.

Alongside this apparent movement toward a more comprehensive radical outlook there was another tendency which was even more clearly compatible with the socialist viewpoint. This tendency, strikingly

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[1] Ibid., 11 June 1881.

reflected in the Radical, was the movement toward the concept of a social as well as political revolution. The Radical was not a socialist paper, and there were as yet few who would describe themselves as socialists in the circle for which it spoke in 1881 and 1882. Yet it reflected and encouraged the conviction that political democracy alone was not enough — that "social" democracy was also needed to solve the social problems that radicals (like the community in general) were becoming more deeply concerned about in this period. In its revolt against Liberalism and its drive for land nationalization, the Radical represented a growing desire for both a thorough reform of the system of property and a new political coalition to advance the interests of labour. This was not socialism, but it was a more socially and economically conscious radicalism -- a kind of radicalism in which socialism might be expected to find a foothold.